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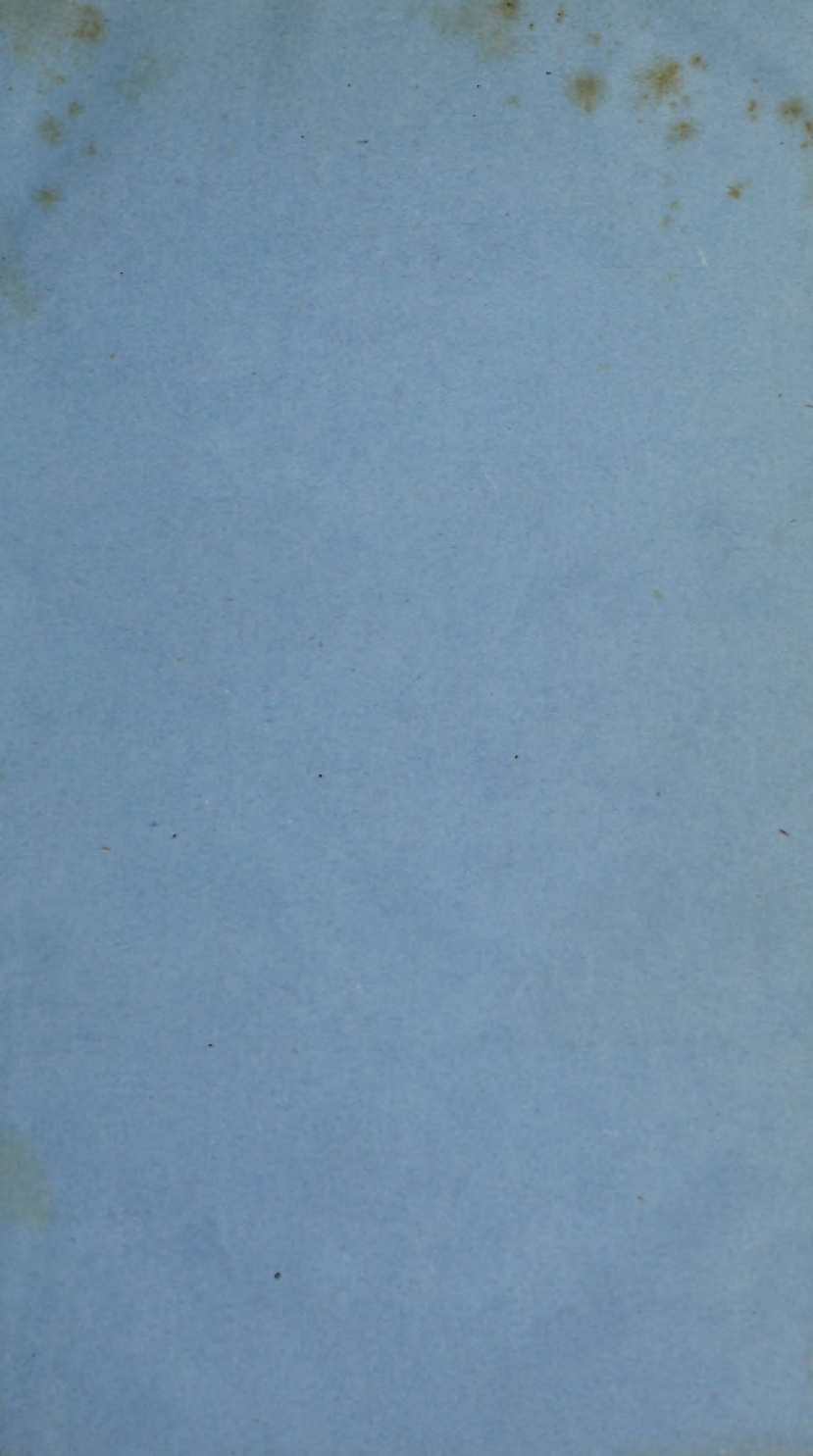
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Sharp, John, 1645-1714.


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THEOLOGICAL WORKS



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THE

THEOLOGICAL WORKS

OF

THE MOST REVEREND

JOHN SHARP, D.D.

LATE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.

A NEW EDITION, IN FIVE VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

OXFORD,
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

MDCCCXXIX.

THE PUBLISHER

TO THE READER.

THE first volume of Archbishop Sharp's Sermons was published by himself, being a collection of such as he had printed upon several occasions before the year 1698.

The second volume was published by his bookseller, after his death, and takes in the remainder of his sermons, which were printed in his lifetime, and his Two Discourses upon Conscience, which were formerly published without a name, and make part of the Collection of London Cases.

And those two volumes contain all that he himself had suffered at any time to go abroad into the world.

But his executors were a little more liberal of his productions; and in 1717 they added to the collections made by himself, and then by his bookseller, as above mentioned, two volumes more, consisting of sermons never before printed. But this step nevertheless was taken by them with due caution, and after advice had with some judicious prelates who had read them after they were transcribed, and confirmed the resolution of making them public.

And now, after several years elapsed, two volumes more have passed the press, being the last addition that will be made to the collection of his Works, save a small reserve of discourses in the popish con-

troversy, which may possibly, some time or other, be published with other of his papers relating to that controversy, and penned likewise in those times.

The first and principal design of transcribing these, which are now printed, from the original manuscripts in short-hand, (for all his sermons were wrote in characters,) was to preserve and rescue them from the danger they were in of being irretrievably lost by being buried in the cipher, if not extracted thence, and brought to light by one who was perfectly well acquainted with the characters he used, and with his peculiar manner of expressing and compounding them. The transcript was begun some years since, and proceeded very leisurely, and with several interruptions, under the uncertain view whether it should ever be made public or no, till the year 1730, when the greatest part of it was finished, perused, and approved by competent judges, and at length prepared for publication.

The reader therefore may be assured (and it is chiefly for his satisfaction in this matter that this Advertisement is prefixed to the edition) that these are the genuine Works of the author to whom the title-page ascribes them; and that they are not rashly obtruded upon the world, as posthumous works too often are, but offered after mature deliberation, and under a real conviction of their being as perfect in their kind as any wherewith this last age hath been presented.

Indeed, the bare avouching them to be genuine supersedes any further recommendation of them. Both the character and writings of the archbishop have been generally so well esteemed, that they

stand in no need of the suffrage of the publisher, but will be able to support themselves (even in an age by no means favourable to good men and good books) so long as truth can stand her ground, and sound reasoning with perspicuity shall be accounted the chief character of perfection in writing, especially upon divine and moral subjects.

Most of the treatises in this first volume are compounded, some of two, some of three sermons, joined together in the form of continued discourses, which will account for the length of several of them, as it also gave occasion to entitle them Discourses rather than Sermons. The design of this disposition was, to preserve the chain of reasoning upon each subject entire and uninterrupted, without those recapitulations which, though necessary indeed under their division into distinct sermons, in order to accommodate them to the pulpit, yet are altogether unnecessary to be retained for the perusal of the reader, who would rather be incommoded than relieved by such unseasonable breaks in the body of a just discourse. But however no more liberty was taken with them than would barely answer this end of convenience, by omitting the introductions or preambles to the subsequent sermons, when more than one were formed upon the same text. And because the same liberty could not be so well taken with the four last sermons in this volume, which are all likewise upon one text, therefore they are published entire, as they were found in the copies.

The other volume consists wholly of single sermons, published verbatim as they were preached, at least without any designed omission or alteration. Most of them had been delivered at court, before

their late majesties king William, queen Mary, and queen Anne, as the dates prefixed to them will shew. And several of them were the sermons which he usually preached in his diocese, and elsewhere, in the latter part of his life, as being best calculated, in his own opinion, (so it may be justly presumed,) for doing good to mankind, and the discharge of his own duty as a minister of the gospel.

Could these sheets have carried any impression of that energy and zeal with which the living author of these Discourses addressed them to his auditors, and to which they owed no small share of that beauty and influence which they once had from his own mouth, they would have been more welcome and more valuable to the reader. One excellence indeed they cannot be deprived of, which, in some measure, will supply the want of those external and additional graces that accompanied and adorned them in the pulpit, viz. that spirit of piety which yet enlivens and breathes through them all, and demonstrates them to be the real issues of his heart, and the very dictates of his soul, by such marks of evidence as are easy to be discovered, though difficult to be described, and impossible to be counterfeited.

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A DISCOURSE

ON

ROMANS VIII. 16.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

THIS passage is something difficult, and commonly not rightly understood: for the clearing of which there are four things to be done.

I. To shew what is meant by *the Spirit*.

II. What is meant by *the children of God*.

III. What is meant by *the Spirit's bearing witness with our spirit*.

IV. How or in what sense *the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*.

The three first of these points are pretty obvious, so that I need spend no time in insisting on them.

1st. By *the Spirit* here is undoubtedly meant that Holy Spirit which our Lord promised he would send upon his disciples after he was ascended into heaven, and which accordingly came upon them on the day of Pentecost, and which from thence forward was to continue with the church to the end of the world. This Spirit is here in the text called *the Spirit itself*, to represent him as a person, because in the verse before the apostle had used this word *spirit* in another sense, viz. for a state and dispensation: *Ye have not, says he, received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the*

spirit of adoption, Rom. viii. 15 : that is, Ye are not now in the Jewish dispensation, which is a dispensation of servants, wherein ye are left to your natural fears ; but ye are in the dispensation of sons ; ye may now call God Father ; *For the Spirit itself* (as he goes on,) that Spirit who hath the principal agency and management of this new dispensation, *bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*

But, 2dly, what is meant by being *the children of God* ? To this I answer, that to be a child of God, in the scripture phrase, is to be an heir of immortality, or to be an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven : that is to say, either in actual possession of it, or in right and title to it. Thus our Saviour tells us, that *they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that future world, and the resurrection from the dead, can die no more : for they are equal to the angels ; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection*, Luke xx. 35, 36. And thus our Saviour himself was styled God's Son, as upon other accounts, so also upon this, that God begot him from the dead, and exalted him to an immortal, glorious life in heaven : *Thou art my Son*, saith God, *this day have I begotten thee*, Psalm ii. 7 ; which passage the apostle applies to our Saviour's resurrection, Acts xiii. 33. And it is with this respect that St. John speaks ; *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is*, 1 John iii. 2. So that to be a son or a child of God, and to have a right and title to eternal life, is the very same thing ; as also sufficiently

appears from the next words that follow after my text; *If we be children, then are we heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together*, Rom. viii. 17.

But, 3dly, what is meant by this expression of *the Spirit's bearing witness with our Spirit*? Is it meant that the Holy Spirit doth, by his secret inspirations, his inward suggestions to the minds of good men, possess them with an opinion, or, if you will, with an assurance, that they are *the children of God*, and that they shall certainly go to heaven, without giving them any reason for it? Thus indeed it is commonly taken; but I can by no means think that this is the meaning of the words. I conceive that which the apostle here meant is this; that the Holy Spirit, by the visible, sensible operations which he wrought in and amongst Christians, gave an assured proof and testimony to their minds that God owned them for his people, and as such would glorify them with his Son Jesus at the last day. That I take to be the meaning of the expression. But now what these operations were, or in what way the Spirit did or doth witness with our spirit, is my

Fourth inquiry; which I shall dwell longer upon. And here it is fit we should take notice, that there is a twofold witness or testimony of the Spirit to our being *the children of God*: the one, general and public, respecting the whole church, or the whole body of those who profess the Christian faith, in opposition to all unbelievers; the other, particular and private, and only respecting single persons. Both these ways, I say, doth *the Spirit witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*;

and to both these ways, it is probable, the apostle had respect in this text.

I. I begin with the public witness. First of all, I say, the Spirit gave an undeniable proof to Christians, that they were *the children of God*, by the public testimony he gave to the truth of the promises of the gospel; in descending upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and enabling them to speak all languages, to cure all diseases, to cast out devils, to raise the dead, to foretell things to come, and to work all sorts of miracles, for the confirmation of the Christian faith; and, which ought to be particularly taken notice of, when he gave them a power likewise to transfer these gifts and powers upon others, even as many as they should lay their hands upon; so that not only the apostles, but a great number of other believers, in all places, were able to work miracles for the attestation of the truth of Christ's doctrine.

Here now was as plain a testimony of the Holy Spirit to the minds of all Christians, that they were *the children of God*, that they had the true religion among them, that they, in opposition both to Jews and pagans, were God's peculiar people, and that he would at the last day, when this world should have an end, own them as such, and reward them with everlasting life, as our Saviour had promised them. I say, here was as effectual a witness of the Spirit to the truth of all this, as was possible to be given: it was both a witness to themselves and to all the world: a witness to their own minds and spirits, for their infinite comfort under all their present distresses, and for their encouragement to persevere steadfastly in the Christian religion, whatever trials they should

be called out unto; a witness also to the unbelieving world for their confusion, if they did not quit their infidelity, and enter themselves into this family of God, this society of Christians, to whom the promises of adoption and eternal life were made over.

But it will be said, How doth this witness of the Spirit concern us who live at this day, and see none of those extraordinary, miraculous effects of the Holy Ghost? how is this a testimony to our spirits, *that we are the children of God*? I answer, It is the same witness and testimony of the Holy Spirit with our spirits that it was when St. Paul wrote this Epistle. We do not, indeed, see now those visible effects and operations of the Holy Spirit, for the convincing us of the truth of Christ's promises, that were then to be seen; but the reason is, because there is no need of it; for if that was a good witness to the minds of Christians then, it is still a good witness to us now. If they, from what they saw, might reasonably be convinced that the Christian religion was the way to heaven; we, from what we read of those things, and the certainty we have of the truth of them, (in all the ways that a thing done long ago may be made certain to us,) we say, we have the same reason to be convinced that Christianity is the way to heaven still.

If it be said that evidence of sense is of greater force than evidence of report, let it come from what hands it will; I answer, I grant it to be so: but yet what we want of the Spirit's witness, by reason of our not being present when those things were done, is abundantly made up by the Spirit's *witness in our days* to the truth of Christ's promises, which they who lived then had not the benefit of. As, for instance, the fulfilling of our Saviour's promises time

after time ; the strange success and speedy propagation of Christ's religion throughout the world ; the miraculous preservation of it in the world ; the destruction of the Devil's empire wherever the Christian faith got footing ; with a great many other things not now seasonable to be insisted on : so that, taking these things together, the fulness of the evidence we have for the truth of the matters of fact, wrought by the Spirit in the ancient times for the confirmation of Christ's doctrine, and the new arguments that the same Spirit hath given us since ; we at this day have as much reason to say with St. Paul, as any in those days had, *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God* ; that we Christians, in contradistinction to men of all other religions, are the very people of God, and heirs of eternal life, if we do not forfeit our title to it by a loose and wicked life.

Two or three practical inferences I desire to draw from this point before I proceed any further.

1. It ought to be matter of unspeakable comfort and rejoicing to us, that we have such an infallible witness as the Spirit of God to bear testimony to our minds that we are in a right and sure way to eternal happiness ; that we wander not in the dark, uncertain what course to steer, and uncertain what will become of us hereafter ; (as they, who are without Christ must needs be ;) but have all the assurance that honest men need, or wise men can reasonably desire, that by believing and practising our religion we shall undoubtedly arrive at immortality. O what a lively sense ought we to have of this inestimable blessing ! how deeply ought we to be affected with it ! how heartily ought we to praise God for it ! We should

never in our devotions leave this unmentioned. We should perpetually acknowledge in the most grateful manner the infinite obligations that God hath put upon us in disposing us into so happy a country as this of ours is, where we have the privileges of a Christian education, and enjoy so plentifully the certain means of obtaining eternal glory.

2. The Spirit's bearing witness to our minds thus effectually *that we are the children of God*, should be an argument to us above all others that we should never depart from our Christian profession, but that we should hold it to our lives' end without wavering; nay, and be zealous for it: for where can we have eternal life but in the faith of Jesus Christ? and to what people in the world hath the Holy Spirit set his seal that they are God's people, but to the society of the Christian church? This consideration should inspire us all with an invincible resolution to maintain our faith against all opposition; it should fortify our minds against all the scoffs and railleries we can meet with from profane, atheistical men in the profession of it. It should comfort and relieve us under all the difficulties or hard circumstances that we can be exposed to upon the account thereof. And, lastly, it should animate us with such a constancy in adhering to this faith, that we should rather choose to quit our lives than to depart from it.

3. We are always to remember, that when the Spirit gave his witness to the Christians that they were the children of God, it was to the Christians as professing the true faith of Christ; to the Christians, as professing that faith which was delivered by our Lord Jesus, and preached by his apostles to the world, and afterwards, by the same apostles or apo-

stolical men, put into writing, and conveyed down to us in the scriptures of the New Testament: and therefore it infinitely concerns us to hold steadfastly that faith which Christ thus delivered, and the apostles preached, and the scriptures contain, (as, God be thanked, that, and no other, is the faith which our church holds forth,) and by no means to add to it or detract from it. So long as we believe and profess Christianity as it was taught in the apostolical times, so long we are sure *the Spirit beareth witness* to us, *that we are the children of God*. But if we take up or receive any other faith, from whatsoever quarter, or under whatsoever specious name it comes recommended; any faith that is contradictory to, or inconsistent with that of the first ages; any faith that may be called another faith from that which is scriptural and was *once delivered to the saints*, Jude 3, then we can no longer warrant that *the Spirit of God* shall bear witness with our spirits, *that we are the children of God*.

4. But, lastly, though it be here said of all Christians in general, that *the Spirit bears witness to them, that they are the children of God*, yet it is to be remembered that no benefit will hereby accrue to any particular person that professeth Christianity, if he does not lead his life according to the precepts of it. And therefore it mightily concerns us all to adorn our profession by a holy life; to take care, *lest that, a promise being made unto us of entering into God's rest, we should fall short thereof*, Heb. iv. 1. through a careless, sensual, ungodly life. It is true, that all men are by baptism made "the children of God and heirs of everlasting life." But yet, no man shall actually inherit that everlasting life but

he who *through the Spirit mortifies the deeds of the body*, Rom. viii. 13. and *lives righteously, soberly, and godly, in this world*, Tit. ii. 12. If it be said, how can this be, that any of those to whom the Spirit witnesseth that they *are the children of God* should prove the children of the Devil? the answer is easy; that whatever they may prove in the event, yet by their Christianity they *are the children of God*, and have a right and title to the inheritance of Christians; but, if they depart from the rules of their religion, they forfeit that right, and they cancel that title by their wickedness and folly. They are just in the case of disobedient, incorrigible children, who were born heirs to a good estate; but through their manifold miscarriages and undutifulness have so provoked their parent, that he at last thinks fit to disinherit them, and cut them off from that which nature and his fatherly kindness first designed them to.

Thus far I have pursued the first notion I gave of the witness of the Spirit, that which is general and public, and concerns the whole body of Christians; and it is in this sense that some of the most learned expositors do understand this text. But yet, for all that, upon a more strict consideration of the apostle's design in this chapter, and of what goes before and what follows after my text, I am very inclinable to think that St. Paul in these words does more principally intend (or at least that he hath a particular respect unto) that latter notion I gave of the witness of the Spirit: I mean that private testimony which the Holy Spirit of God gives to the minds of particular Christians that they are in the favour of God, and shall be rewarded with our

Lord Jesus at the last day. He doth not exclude the public, miraculous testimony which the Holy Spirit in those days gave to the Christian cause; but he seems to take in also another testimony of the Spirit by which every Christian then might, and all Christians to the end of the world may conclude, that they in particular were and are the elect of God, and shall certainly one day be glorified with our Lord Jesus Christ. This is that which I called the private witness of the Spirit, and which only concerns particular persons; and of this I come now to treat in the second place.

II. If it be asked what this private witness of the Spirit is to the minds of particular persons, that they *are the children of God*, or wherein it doth consist; I answer very briefly, As far as we can gather from the apostle's discourse, both in this place and in others of his Epistles, it consists in this; viz. in the Holy Ghost's dwelling in the hearts of particular Christians, and enabling them to mortify their lusts, and to lead an holy life in all sobriety, righteousness, and godliness. Now this indwelling of the Spirit, and these fruits thereof, wherever they are found, are to those that have them a seal of the Spirit of God upon their souls, *whereby they are sealed to the day of redemption*, Eph. iv. 30. as the apostle expresses it. They are *an earnest* or *a pledge* of their future happiness, as the same apostle in other places calls them, 2 Cor. i. 22. v. 5. Ephes. i. 13, 14. Lastly, they are a testimony or evidence to their spirits that they are the true sons of God, and shall be glorified with Jesus Christ in another world; which is the tenor of his expression in my text.

Now that this is the true meaning of *the Spirit's*

witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God, so far as that witness concerns particular persons, will appear evidently from what goes before in this chapter. The main design that the apostle is pursuing is, to encourage and animate the Christians of his time against the sufferings and persecutions they were likely to meet with in this world upon account of their religion; and this he doth chiefly from the consideration of the great rewards that were laid up for them in the other world: and to this purpose he tells them, in the 10th verse, *If Christ be in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness*, Rom. viii. 10: that is, Your body is indeed obnoxious to all sorts of outward calamities, and even to death itself, which is entailed upon the sons of Adam upon account of sin: but yet the Spirit of Christ, which he hath given to dwell in you, will procure you a glorious life in another world, upon account of that inward, spiritual righteousness which he worketh in you. This is the sense of that verse. But because what he here saith is very shortly expressed, and so might be obscure, he explains himself sufficiently in the next verse: *If*, says he, *the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you*, verse 11. Here the apostle speaks plainly, and his words need no comment; and I desire you to attend to them, for they seem to fix the sense of all that follows after. That which comes next in the three verses following are these words: *Therefore, brethren, ye are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh*, ver. 12, (and

the reason he intimated before, for it was that which wrought death in the world,) *but to the Spirit, to live after the Spirit. For*, says he, *if you live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live*, verse 13; that is, live in another world. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God*, (that is, as many as the Spirit of God dwells in,) *they are the sons of God*, verse 14; that is, as I explained before, they are the children of God, because they shall be the children of the resurrection. *For*, as he goes on in the next verse, *ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear*; viz. Ye are not brought back again to such a dispensation as the Jews were, under the Mosaical covenant, which made no promises of eternal life; but the people under it were left to their own fears and natural apprehensions of a future judgment; and the letter of the law gave them no relief against it: *but*, says the apostle, *ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father*, verse 15. viz. Ye are now in a gracious dispensation, in a filial state, where ye may cheerfully call God, *Abba*, which, being interpreted, is *Father*; and, as his children, not doubt of receiving an inheritance from him in the world to come. And then come in the words of my text: *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*, ver. 16: *and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together*, ver. 17. The plain sense of which words, if we make them to cohere with all that went before, cannot appear to be other than this; viz. that that Spirit which dwelt in Christ, now dwelling in

Christians; that Spirit, which raised up Jesus, now raising up his members from the death of sin to a life of righteousness, is a witness to all those in whom he doth thus dwell, to all those who are thus led by him; is a strong evidence to their minds that they are the sons of God and the brethren of Christ, and consequently that they shall be sharers of his inheritance, and be glorified with him; if so be they do patiently and constantly endure the sufferings they are called out to for his cause, as he did before them.

This, as I take it, is the full sense of this text. And now I hope I may have liberty to make some practical observations upon it, and then I shall conclude.

1. And first of all, from this account that has been given, we may learn what the true marks are of a child of God; or upon what grounds any person can rationally assure himself that he is in God's favour, and shall go to heaven. For as the miraculous operations of the Spirit in the days of the apostles were the public testimony of the Holy Ghost that the Christian church in general was the people of God, and designed to everlasting happiness; so the Spirit's dwelling in the souls of particular Christians is his private testimony to particular persons that they are effectually the children of God, and shall be actually raised up to everlasting happiness. This, I say, is the great, if not the only evidence that any person can give to himself of his particular right and title to the kingdom of heaven. And this, I think, is clear from what has been said: but, if it be not, pray observe the apostle's words a little before, at verse 9th, which will put the matter out of

doubt, viz. *Ye are not*, saith he, *in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*, ver. 9. So that to have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us is a certain proof that we belong to Christ: and, on the other side, not to have him dwell in us is a certain proof that we do not belong to Christ.

But doth not the Spirit dwell with all Christians? I answer, No, by no means. All persons indeed that are baptized, and profess Christianity, are by designation the temples of the Holy Ghost; for the Holy Spirit would dwell in them: but yet for all that, he doth not actually dwell in all, because some of them do themselves put a bar to it. The Holy Spirit dwells with his church, is present in all Christ's public ordinances and administrations, and is ready to assist every person that doth with sincerity apply himself to the service of Jesus Christ. But he dwells not with any soul but those that have so far made use of his assistance, and encouraged his holy motions, that they begin to frame their actions according to his conduct, and he becomes a principle in them of a holy Christian life.

But you will say, this is hard to be understood: you tell us, that the Spirit's dwelling within us is the evidence of our being the sons of God; but still we are at a loss to know when the Spirit dwells within us. I answer, you need not be much at a loss for the knowing of that; for St. Paul, in those very passages I have now read to you, has given you sufficient rules by which you may judge whether the Spirit of God dwell in you or no; and they do amount to this: we may know we have the Spirit,

if we be led by the Spirit, ver. 14: that is, if our designs and actions be in the general course of our lives suitable to the precepts of the gospel. Again, we may know we have the Spirit, *if we do not live after the flesh, but endeavour to mortify the deeds of the body*, verse 13. Again, a third time in this chapter he tells us how we may know whether we be in the flesh or in the Spirit: *They*, saith he, *that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit do mind the things of the Spirit*, ver. 5.

If all this be not plain enough, let us consult him further in another Epistle, viz. to the Galatians, chap. v.; where he tells us plainly, that we may know we are in the flesh, if we do the works of the flesh; and we may know that we are led by the Spirit, if we bring forth the fruits of the Spirit: *The works of the flesh*, says he, *are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*, ver. 19, 20, 21. *But*, on the other side, *the fruits of the Spirit* are these; *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance:—and they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*, ver. 22, 23, 24. I do not know what plainer signs or characters can be given, either on the one hand, of sin reigning in us, or, on the other hand, of the Spirit's dwelling in us, than these that are here given by the apostle.

2. Taking now this for granted, I observe, in the second place, that that which some people take for a mark of a true child of God is no mark at all. Some do so understand these words in my text, of *the Spirit's witnessing with our spirit, that we are the children of God*, as to conclude that if they have an impulse or impression on their own minds that they are in a state of grace, and the elect of God; if it be strongly whispered and suggested to them, though they do not know why nor wherefore, that they are in the right way, and that God accepts of them; why this passes with them for *the witness of the Spirit of God with their spirits, that they are the children of God*. And, on the other side, others that have not these comfortable impressions, these satisfactions, this *assurance* (as they call it) in their own minds; but are fearful, and apt to distrust their condition, and to believe the worst of themselves, [these] conclude that they have not this *witness of the Spirit* that my text speaks of, and consequently that their portion is like to be very miserable. But in truth, neither the one nor the other of these persons I have now represented do reason right in this matter. The former are not one whit the better or the safer for their comfortable persuasion of themselves; nor are the latter in any more danger for their melancholy apprehensions concerning their condition. Both the one and the other must be tried by the fruits they bring forth in their lives, and not by unaccountable impulses. The most sanguine man, the most confident and assured person, if he do not bring forth the fruits of the Spirit I have now named, hath no testimony from the Holy Ghost (whatever he fancies) *that he is the child of God*. And again,

the most dejected and melancholy soul, if he do in his life and conversation bring forth these fruits, he hath *the witness of the Spirit that he is the child of God*, though he be not aware of it ; and though, through the present disorders of his mind, he is not capable of receiving any comforts from it.

3. But lastly, and to conclude ; since all the evidence we can give to ourselves that we in particular are the children of God, is, that the Holy Spirit dwelleth within us ; how infinitely doth it concern us both to endeavour that the Holy Ghost should take up his habitation in our hearts ; and also, after he hath so done, to be careful that we do not by our ill treatment of him give him cause to depart from us ! Would we invite and prevail with the Holy Spirit to come and dwell within us ? the way is, to forsake our sins, and to devote ourselves entirely to God's service ; and to solicit him most earnestly with our daily prayers that he would purify our hearts, that they may become a temple fit for him to dwell in ; and withal to encourage and improve every good motion and every opportunity that he puts into our hands of growing in virtue and goodness. By this means we shall allure the good Spirit of God to take up his lodging in our hearts. And when once it is our happiness to have received so illustrious a guest, O with what zeal should we endeavour to preserve him ! how careful should we be not to admit any thing into our hearts that may grieve him, or give him occasion of displeasure ! how watchful ought we to be over ourselves that we do not engage in any unlawful course, any sin against conscience ! for that is directly to affront him, and to take part with his enemies. With

what diligence ought we to guard ourselves from all sorts of impurity and sensuality ! because these are the things that of all others do most defile our bodies, and render them unfit for the spirit of purity to dwell in, as the apostle often tells us, 1 Cor. vi. 13—20. Lastly, how industrious should we be to take all occasions of improving every grace and every virtue with which God hath adorned our souls : and in order to that, to make use of all those means that our Lord Jesus has appointed for that purpose ; amongst which the frequent receivings of the blessed sacrament is a principal one.

These are the methods by which we may secure the Holy Spirit to ourselves. This is the way to make him dwell with us for evermore ; and never to leave us, never to quit his habitation ; but to be our constant guide here, and our rewarder hereafter : to be in us a constant principle of grace in this world, and to raise us up to an eternal and unspeakable glory in the world to come.

A DISCOURSE

ON

JOHN XIV. 16.

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.

Or thus :

I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Advocate, that he may abide with you for ever.

THE word in the original is παράκλητος, which, because it comes from a word that hath a double signification, our translators made a doubt whether they should render *a comforter* or *an advocate*; and therefore for sureness sake they put in both the words; the one in the text, and the other in the margin of our Bibles ^a.

But undoubtedly παράκλητος here hath the signification of *an advocate*, and not of *a comforter*, as I shall shew by and by: and therefore I shall all along follow the latter translation.

The words are part of the last sermon that our Saviour made to his disciples immediately before his passion. And indeed a very comfortable sermon it was, and very seasonable to his apostles, who at that time stood in great need of comfort. They now saw their dear Lord and Master was to be taken from them, and to be delivered into the hands of wicked men, and to be crucified, Matt. xxvi. 2.

^a So also in John xv. 26. and xvi. 7. and ver. 26. of this chapter.

upon this, *sorrow* (as there was great reason) *filled their hearts*, John xvi. 6. and they could not but look upon themselves in a most deplorable and desolate condition. Our merciful Saviour was not wanting to them upon this sad occasion; but as he had always treated them with the greatest kindness and tenderness in the world, so now he more especially sets himself to ease their troubled minds, and to fortify them against the approaching disasters. Many excellent considerations he proposeth to this purpose: but three things especially he insists on in this chapter; which, if they were well considered, would afford them unspeakable consolation, by letting them see that it was much better for them that he should leave them, than that he should stay any longer with them. The first thing was, that he did not mean to leave them with a design of returning no more to them, but he only went as an harbinger before them, to prepare them places in his heavenly kingdom: and he would in due time come again and fetch them, and bring them thither, where they should for ever enjoy him, without fear of parting any more: *Let not*, saith he, *your hearts be troubled*^b: *believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And*^c *having gone and prepared a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also*, John xiv. 1, 2, 3. Secondly, this further eminent advantage they should receive from his going to his Father, that thereby they should be secure of

^b It is the marginal reading.

^c Ἐὰν πορευθῶ, *after I shall have gone, &c.* see Grot.

a friend and a patron in the court of heaven. Hereby he should be put into a capacity of doing every thing for them that they desired : for so great from henceforward should his authority be with his Father, and so powerful his intercession, that they should ask nothing in his name (if it was for the interest of the church) but it should be granted: *Because I go unto my Father*, says he, *whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it*, ver. 12, 13, 14. These things considered, they had no reason to be troubled at his departure, but rather to rejoice: *If ye loved me*, says he, *ye would rejoice, because I go to the Father*, ver. 28. especially when he assured them, in the third place, that though he left them for the present, yet, as soon as he was ascended to the Father, he would send down another to supply his place with them: one that should take care of their concerns; should manage all their affairs; should be their great patron and advocate in the world; and he should never leave them, but abide with them and their successors, and with all believers to the end of the world: and this should be no other than *the Spirit of truth*. This is the sense of my text: *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Advocate, that he may abide with you for ever*, ver. 16. *even the Spirit of truth*, as it follows in the next verse, *whom the world cannot receive: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you*.

Now upon this account his stay among them was so far from being desirable, that he tells them, in the sixteenth chapter, ver. 7. that *it was expedient for*

them that he should go away : for if he did not go away, (if he did not ascend to the Father,) the Advocate would not come unto them ; but if he departed, he would send him to them. The coming of the Advocate, then, was to be the effect of his ascension into heaven, and of his powerful intercession with God. And that is the reason why he says in the text, *I will pray the Father, and he shall give him unto you.* And that is the reason why St. John says in another place, chap. vii. ver. 39. that *the Holy Spirit was not yet given ; because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

There are three points which the text leads me to inquire into : all of them very useful, because very conducing to a right understanding of the Christian dispensation, and that method which God set on foot for the bringing men to salvation by Jesus Christ.

1. And first of all ; whereas our Saviour here and in other places speaks of the Holy Ghost under the notion of a *Paraclete*, which our translator's commonly express a *Comforter*, but, I think, might more properly be rendered an *Advocate* ; I shall inquire into the importance of that term, and give an account of the true notion of it, that so we may all know what we mean when we call the Holy Ghost a *Paraclete*, or *Advocate*, or *Comforter*.

2. Secondly ; whereas our Saviour here saith that *he will pray the Father, and he shall give them another Advocate* ; by which it is implied that the Holy Ghost is not the only Advocate, but that our Saviour is one Advocate and the Holy Ghost another ; I shall therefore inquire into the difference between our Saviour's advocateship and that of the

Holy Ghost, or in what respect Jesus Christ is our advocate, and in what respect the Holy Ghost is.

3. Thirdly; whereas our Saviour tells his disciples that this Advocate whom he should send, *even the Spirit of truth*, should abide with them for ever; and yet it is plain matter of fact that he doth not now abide in the church in the same manner that he did with the apostles; I shall therefore, in the last place, inquire into the several acts, or instances, or expressions of this advocateship of the Holy Ghost, and shew which of them were peculiar to the times of the apostles and the primitive Christians, and which of them were common to all the times and ages of Christianity.

I. I begin with the notion or signification of the term *Paraclete*, which is here and in other places used by St. John to express the office of the Holy Ghost, and which accordingly hath ever since been by the church in a manner appropriated to him. Thus in the *Te Deum*, “Also the Holy Ghost the Paraclete;” for that is the word in the original. It is used but five times in the whole New Testament, four times in this Gospel of St. John, where the Holy Spirit is spoken of; and once in an Epistle of the same apostle, where our Saviour is spoken of: *If any man, says he, sin, we have a Paraclete with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins*, 1 Ep. ii. 1.

But now in these places where it is applied to the Spirit our translators have always rendered it *Comforter*; and in that place where it is applied to our Saviour they have rendered it *Advocate*; but what foundation there is for this distinction I do not know. It seems more reasonable to think that St. John

meant the same thing by παράκλητος when he used it of our Saviour, and when he used it of the Holy Ghost: and therefore since it is clear that in that text where this name is given to our Saviour it ought to be rendered *Advocate*, and not *Comforter*; [for to translate the apostle's words thus; *If any man sin, we have a Comforter with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins*—— will make no good sense; for when we have offended a person, we have need of an advocate with him, and not a comforter; one to make intercession for us, and not one to give consolation;] I say, since this is clear and beyond dispute, then, methinks, it should be clear also, that in those other four texts, where the name of *Paraclete* is by the same writer given to the Holy Spirit, it ought to be rendered *Advocate* likewise, or at least by some other word of an equivalent signification. And this will appear yet clearer when we consider, that in one of these very texts where the Holy Ghost is called *the Paraclete*, he is plainly represented under the notion of *an Advocate*, and not of *a Comforter*. The passage which I mean is John xvi. 7, 8, 9. which I shall explain particularly hereafter.

I will but add one thing more, and I leave this criticism; that in all Greek authors, as far as I can learn, παράκλητος hath always the signification of *an advocate*, or one that is called to assist and defend another when he is to answer in a court of judicature; but is never used to signify *a comforter*. And this was the notion also that the Jews had of a paraclete; from whom we may reasonably presume that St. John had this word, as appears by that known proverb of theirs in the Talmud, “ He that keeps one com-

“mandment makes to himself a paraclete, or an advocate; but he that commits one sin prepares to himself an accuser.”

I should not have been so long about a signification of a word, but that I think it is of some importance to us to have a right notion of the character which the Holy Ghost bears in the Christian dispensation, which you see is primarily that of an *advocate*; that being the proper signification of *paraclete*.

Taking the word now in this notion, it will signify to us in general such a person as appears in the behalf of another; such a person as defends another when harm is intended against him; such a person as interests himself in the affairs of another, either by entreating for him, or pleading his cause, or any ways managing his business: in a word, any one that is concerned for another as a patron or defender, solicitor or intercessor, is a paraclete, or an advocate, in the sense that is here intended. And thus much of the notion or signification of a paraclete in general; which was my first point.

II. Well now, both our Saviour and the Holy Ghost, as the scriptures inform us, are thus our paracletes, our advocates, our patrons. The next question therefore is, wherein the patronage or advocacy of the one differs from that of the other: in what sense our Saviour is our advocate, and in what sense the Holy Spirit is so?

Now, if we look into the scriptures, we shall find that the difference of this office in these two Persons lies in this; viz. that our Saviour is our patron in heaven, and the Holy Spirit on earth. Our Saviour pleads our cause and manages our affairs there, and

the Holy Spirit, as his deputy and vicegerent, doth it here. Our Saviour is our *advocate with the Father*, as St. John in the forecited place expressly calls him; and the Holy Spirit is our advocate with the world. Our Saviour appears for us before God the Father, who is considered as the great Lord of all; and the Holy Spirit appears for us, and for our cause, against the world and the Devil, who are considered as our adversaries or accusers. They both have undertaken the defence of the same cause and of the same persons, but in these different respects.

1. To treat of this matter a little more distinctly; and first of all as to the advocateship of our Saviour.

The scriptures assure us that our Saviour, having given up himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, ascended up into heaven, with this mind and intent, to appear before God for us; to present himself to his Father with that sacrifice that had been offered up on the cross on our behalf. As the high priests under the law, who were the great types of Christ, carried the blood of the sacrifices that were slain into the holy of holies, which was the representative of heaven, and there presented that blood before God for the atonement of the people of Israel, for whom those sacrifices were slain; so, I say, did our Saviour, the true High Priest of the world, upon his ascension, present himself with his sacrifice before God in the heavenly tabernacle, the holy of holies, *not made with hands*: and by the merits and virtue thereof did then begin (and will for ever continue it) to recommend all Christians, and all their concerns, and all their prayers, to his heavenly Fa-

ther, to intercede for them continually; and to render God favourable and propitious to them. This is that which the apostle tells us, in the ninth of the Hebrews, ver. 24. *Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true one; but into heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for us.* Thus also in the seventh chapter, ver. 24, 25. *This man, says he, meaning our Saviour, because he continueth for ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Whereby he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he evermore liveth to make intercession for them.* And thus, lastly, St. Paul, in the eighth to the Romans, ver. 33, 34. *Who, says he, shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who sitteth at the right hand of God to make intercession for us.*

It would take up too much time to mention all those places of scripture that relate to this advocacy of Christ that we are now speaking of. I shall only observe these following particulars concerning it, which may sufficiently explain the nature of it to us. And I draw them all from the Epistle to the Hebrews, where this point is largely treated of.

First of all, that the advocateship of our Saviour only respects God; and it consists in this, that he doth continually commend us and our affairs to his heavenly Father: *He is our Advocate with the Father*, as St. John styles him, 1 Ep. ii. 1.

2dly, This advocateship of his, this intercession for us, is not in an humble, supplicatory way, but with power and never-failing efficacy: so that what-

ever he represents to God as his desire on our behalf, he certainly and effectually obtains for us.

3dly, This advocateship of Christ, and the efficacy of it, hath its foundation principally in the virtue and merits of that sacrifice of himself which he offered to God upon the cross.

4thly, This advocateship of Christ is the very same thing with his everlasting priesthood. Christ is therefore our High Priest, because he is our patron with God, and continually intercedes with him on our behalf: this being the notion of a priest. Whether his offering up himself upon the cross at Jerusalem was an act of his priesthood, or rather a consecration to it, I will not now dispute; but he became *a High Priest after the order of Melchisedec*, (which is the notion of his priesthood that St. Paul all along pursues in his Epistle to the Hebrews,) when, after he was raised from the dead, he entered into the holy of holies, with that body of his that had been offered on the cross, and sat down on God's right hand, and became our Patron, our Advocate, our Intercessor with God for ever. At the same time indeed he became our King too; for then he had *all power given him in heaven and in earth*. But there is this difference between these two offices, that the one of them respects God, the other respects us: as our Priest, he intercedes with God for us: as our King, he employs that power which he hath received from God in the governing us.

5thly and lastly, Christ being thus our High Priest, our Advocate with God, it follows that all our prayers to God ought to be put up in his name; since it is he that presents them to God, it is he *through whom we have access to the Father*, Eph.

ii. 18. It is for his sake, and upon his account, that they are at any time effectual. All the returns of our prayers, and all the blessings we receive from God's hands, are owing to the virtue of our Saviour's intercession and advocateship.

This is a full and plain account of our Saviour's advocateship. And by these particulars we may easily discern in how different a sense the same office is given to the Holy Ghost; which is the other thing I come to speak to.

2. The advocateship of the Holy Ghost, as I said before, is not in heaven, but in the world : doth not so much respect God, as the world and the Devil. His office is in the place of Christ to plead the cause of the church against its enemies; to be its patron and defender upon earth, and to manage the affairs of it so, that it may be victorious in this world over all its opposers. Under this notion of an advocate he is plainly represented in John xvi. 7—11. a passage which I before referred to, but shall now explain more fully, because it is an express declaration of the advocateship of the Holy Spirit, and a clear account of the effects that should ensue upon his descent on the apostles, as the patron of the Christian cause:—*Nevertheless I tell you the truth, says our Lord to his disciples, It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter [Advocate] will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judg-*

ed. Now we shall have a very easy admission into the sense of this difficult passage, as it hath been usually accounted, if we translate παράκλητος, *Advocate*, instead of *Comforter*, and ἐλέγξει τὸν κόσμον, *convince* the world, as it is in the margin, instead of *reprove* the world, as our translators have rendered it in the text. That there is good ground for the former alteration appears not only from what hath been said upon my first head, by way of criticism upon the word παράκλητος, but from the acts attributed to him in this place; for *reproving* or *convincing the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment*, are the proper acts or offices of an *Advocate*, but by no means of a *Comforter*. And that we have sufficient authority for the latter alteration is evident from a parallel place to this in the eighth chapter of this Gospel, ver. 46, Τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐλέγχει, or as some copies read it ἐλέγξει; *which of you convinceth me of sin?* that is, which of you can shew me that I am guilty of sin in teaching and in acting as I do? And besides, though it may be good sense to say that the Holy Ghost shall *reprove* the world of *sin*, yet that term is not applicable to the two instances that follow; for it is not sense to say, he shall *reprove* the world of *righteousness* or of *judgment*. Another passage there is in Titus i. 9. which will shew us the full import of ἐλέγχειν in this place. There it is said that a bishop should be qualified not only to exhort, but also ἐλέγχειν τοὺς ἀντιλέγοντας, *to convince the gainsayers*; to justify the things of Christ against all opposers.

This then certainly is the sense of the word in this passage that we are upon; viz. that when the Holy Ghost, the advocate for Christians, is come, he

will convince the world, he will justify the cause of Christ to the world, both in point of sin, in point of righteousness, and in point of judgment. The office of an advocate is to defend and make good the cause he hath undertaken: so the Holy Ghost, having, as an advocate, espoused the cause of Christ, he will maintain it, and justify it against all opposition.

As to the three particular instances in which he will justify it we now come to give an account.

And here, in the first place, let us consider what this cause of Christ was that this Advocate undertook to justify and defend. The cause of Jesus Christ was plainly this: God sent him into the world as the great Prophet who was to declare his will to mankind, in order to their salvation: but he was looked upon by the Jews as a false prophet, as an impostor and deceiver; and, instead of giving him that entertainment and reception that was due to him, they crucified and slew him. All which was brought to pass by the contrivance and instigation of the Devil, the prince of this world, who, having long usurped an empire and dominion over mankind, was loath to be thrown out of his possession, which he was sure to be as soon as Jesus should be believed on in the world: and therefore, by procuring that he should be thus punished as a malefactor, thought by this means to quash for ever all his pretences of being a Prophet, and so to secure and establish his own kingdom. This was the cause of Christ which the Holy Ghost came to vindicate.

Now the question comes, What the Holy Ghost was to do in the vindication of it? in what instances he was to shew himself an advocate for this cause which he had espoused? In answer to this question,

if we consider our Saviour's case, we cannot even, according to the principles of common reason, and the use and practice of mankind in these matters, desire more to be done by him than these three things :

1st, To justify the truth of our Saviour's mission ; to convince the world that Jesus Christ was that great Prophet which God had promised to send for the salvation of mankind, and that it was a great sin in those to whom he was sent that they did not believe in him.

2dly, To vindicate the personal innocence and righteousness of Jesus Christ ; to shew that he was really a virtuous, holy person, however he was thought of in the world ; and at the same time to make out the equity and righteousness of God in suffering him to be so evil treated.

3dly, To make out the justice or the judgment of God upon those that were the authors of those injuries that Christ suffered in the world ; to shew that he was so far from countenancing or abetting the wicked conspiracy against Jesus, that he gave a manifest evidence of his justice by retaliating upon the principal agent and contriver of it what he thought to have done to Jesus ; that is, destroying and casting him out of all that power and dominion which he had hitherto possessed in the world.

These three things, I say, in common reason, and according to the course of proceedings among men in like cases, were the principal points which it concerned the Holy Ghost, as an advocate, to vindicate the cause of Christ in : and these are the very things which our Saviour said he should do when he came into the world ; and accordingly when he came he did them effectually.

First of all, he *convinced the world of sin, because they believed not in Jesus Christ*, ver. 9: viz. he gave a proof beyond all exception and contradiction that Jesus Christ was the great Prophet sent from God; and that the Jews who did not receive him were guilty of a very great sin, and still a greater in that they crucified him. For let this only be considered, that the Jews had now been four hundred years without the Holy Spirit; so long, at least, had the gifts of prophecy and all other miraculous powers been absent from them; and all this time they were expecting the Messiah. Now certainly the Holy Ghost being thus visibly sent down upon the disciples of Christ, after so long an absence, and manifesting himself to their eyes, to their ears, to all their senses in so illustrious a manner, by the mighty works that he wrought, and the wonderful gifts that he bestowed, could not but be an argument beyond all contradiction that Jesus was from God, and consequently that the Jews, in not believing on him, were guilty of a very great sin. For these being things which it was not possible should be brought about by human arts or devices, nor by the power of the Devil, because they evidently tended to the destruction of his kingdom, must necessarily be from God; and consequently Jesus Christ was owned by him as a true Prophet, which was a plain and sufficient conviction of the sin of the Jews in rejecting him.

Secondly, he *convinced the world of righteousness, because*, says our Saviour, *I go to my Father, and ye see me no more*, ver. 10. And here the point is, what righteousness that was that the Advocate should convince the world of: certainly it must

either be Christ's righteousness or God's righteousness. The sense is good either way; and the reason here annexed is as applicable to the one sense as to the other.

[1.] The Holy Ghost coming down was a demonstration of Christ's righteousness, viz. that he was in his own person very innocent, noways a criminal, as the Jews had accounted him, and accordingly, in pursuance thereof, had condemned him: for had he been a wicked, flagitious person, God could never have owned him for his Son, and exalted him to that high power and dignity in heaven and in earth, that it was apparent and evident he was exalted to, by his having power to send down the Holy Ghost, and by him to achieve such wonderful things as proclaimed Jesus Christ to all the world to be the very Son of God, and that he was gone to his Father.

[2.] Again, the Holy Spirit's coming down was likewise a means to *convince the world of righteousness* with respect to God; that is to say, to take off the objection that might have been made against the equity of God's dealing with Jesus Christ, to suffer him, who was so innocent a person, to fall into such hard circumstances, and undergo such unheard-of sufferings and persecutions. For by his appearing with such mighty signs and wonders for the maintenance and justification of the cause of Christ, he shewed clearly to all the world that God had made a sufficient compensation to our Lord Jesus for all that he underwent, having exalted him to his own right hand, and for the suffering of death made him *both Lord and Christ*, Acts ii. 36. *and given him a name above every name, so that every knee should*

bow, and every tongue confess to him, both of things in heaven and things in earth, as the apostle speaks, Phil. ii. 9, 10, 11.

But, [3dly,] there is another point mentioned with reference to which the Holy Ghost should convince the world, and that is in point of judgment. The Advocate, *when he cometh, shall convince the world of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged*, John xvi. 11. By *judgment* here is plainly meant God's punitive justice. The Devil, or *prince of the world*, had by his instruments, as he thought, effectually brought destruction upon Jesus Christ, and put an end to his pretences of being the Messiah that was to rule the world. It therefore concerned the justice of God's providence to retaliate upon the Devil this mischief which he had wrought; and by sending down the Holy Ghost, the Advocate, he effectually did it; for by this means the Devil was brought to suffer that judgment and condemnation which he meant to have brought upon our Saviour. He meant to destroy Jesus Christ: but now *he that had the power of death, the Devil himself*, was destroyed, Heb. ii. 14. And this our Lord himself foretold, when he first sent out his disciples by the power of the Spirit to preach the gospel; *I beheld Satan*, says he, *as lightning fall from heaven*, Luke x. 18. And indeed he fell unexpectedly from all that power and authority which he had so long exercised among the nations: for no sooner did the Holy Ghost come upon the disciples, but they converted mankind, wherever they came, from the slavery of the Devil to the liberty of the sons of God. The effects of which, with reference to our purpose, were two:

[1.] All the oracles which had been so frequent, and made so great a noise in all parts of the world, were struck dumb : and this we have not only from the authority of the primitive Christian fathers, who made use of this as a great argument (and indeed it was so) for the truth of Christianity ; but also from the acknowledgment of the pagans themselves. Porphyry confesses that after the time that the religion of Jesus was preached in the world they had no benefit by their oracles or by their sacrifices, but they seemed to be forsaken by their gods. And Plutarch hath left us a book upon record of the ceasing of the oracles in all places ; of which he can give no account ; but we Christians can.

[2.] The other effect was the throwing out idolatry in all places wherever the Christian religion was entertained. The Devil, in all pagan countries before our Saviour's time, had his temples, sacrifices, mysteries, and all the instances of divine worship paid unto him. And indeed he might, in a proper sense enough, at that time be styled *the God of this world*, 2 Cor. iv. 4. for all mankind but the Jews did pay him homage. But upon the coming of the Advocate after our Saviour's ascension, and the mighty evidence that he gave of the truth of the Christian religion for near three hundred years together, all those idolatries wore off, and the world was no longer subject to the prince of darkness, but became worshippers of the only true God, *and of Jesus Christ whom he had sent* : the heathenish temples were demolished, their sacrifices turned out of doors, their idols broken down, and wherever Christianity prevailed *there were no other gods but one* : and it did prevail over all the Roman empire,

which was then the most considerable part of the known world. And God be thanked, it doth prevail at this day, and ever will do so through the power of the blessed Spirit, its patron and defender, who manages the affairs of it and of every particular Christian so, that at length all the true members of the church may attain to that eternal inheritance that Christ purchased for them.

Having shewed then the different nature and effects of the advocateship of Jesus Christ in heaven, and that of the blessed Spirit upon earth, I now proceed to my third and last general head; which is, to inquire into the several acts, or instances, or expressions of this advocateship of the Holy Ghost, (by which he began to administer this office for the church, and by which he continues still to do it, and will do so to the end of the world,) and to shew which of them were peculiar to the times of the apostles, and which of them are common to all the times and ages of Christianity.

III. It is very easy to gather from what hath been said, that the Holy Ghost was a patron or advocate for the Christian cause in the times of the apostles in a way quite different from that in succeeding ages; for the reason is obvious: the world was then to be convinced of sin, righteousness, and judgment; now the world is convinced of all these in the manner I have before described: the gospel was then to be effectually preached and propagated among unbelievers and idolatrous nations; now the gospel is preached and churches are planted: Christianity was then to meet with a world of opposition; now it is entertained as the public religion of many kingdoms and nations: there was then all sorts of di-

vine evidence to be given for the truth and credibility of it, in order for the conversion of the world to it; but now, we enjoying the benefits of those miraculous evidences, and having, besides, other abundant proofs of the truth of Christianity, (which they in that age had not,) there is no need that those miracles should be continued or repeated.

This difference of the times and states of things makes the administration of the Holy Ghost's office in those times to be different also from what it is in these; though yet he is still as much the advocate for Christ and the church as he was at first; and doth and will abide with it for ever, as our Saviour promised in my text.

1. Well, as to those instances of the Holy Ghost's advocateship, which were peculiar to the apostles and their times, the scripture mentions these four following:

First of all, the Holy Ghost shewed himself an advocate for the Christians in that he spoke in them and for them to kings and governors, before whom they were convened for the cause of Christ; bestowing upon them likewise an extraordinary boldness and presence of mind in preaching the gospel. This assistance of the Holy Spirit we find our Saviour promised to his disciples when he gave them their first commission to preach; *Ye shall be brought, says he to them, before governors and kings for my name's sake, for a testimony to them and the Gentiles, Matth. x. 18. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak, ver. 19. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you, ver. 20.* And this

promise we find was abundantly made good in St. Peter and St. Stephen, and others of the first martyrs. Now though I doubt not but God will sufficiently assist all pious persons in these days, when they are called out to bear testimony to the cause of Christ; yet I much doubt whether in any case they are to expect the same inspiration that is here promised the apostles; so that words shall be put into their mouths when they preach, or when they pray, or when they make any other discourse, without using the common means of meditation and the like.

Secondly, another instance of the Holy Ghost's advocateship for the apostles was the bringing all things to their remembrance whatever Christ had said to them; so that no passage of our Saviour's discourses to them was forgot by them, but was ready at hand in their memories when there was occasion for it. This our Saviour himself instanceth in as one of the things that the Advocate when he came should do for them; as we have it in the 26th verse of this chapter; *These things, saith he, have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you*, John xiv. 25, 26. Now it is plain, beyond all contradiction, that this must be spoken to the apostles only who heard what he had said, and could not possibly relate to any that came after them.

Thirdly, the Holy Ghost did not only bring all things to their remembrance, but furnished them with a power of judging unerringly as to matters of faith; so that they should not only remember the

doctrine of our Saviour, but rightly understand it; and be able, without any mistake, to propose it to others. (And certainly this was a privilege which no particular man, and no particular church, since the apostles' time, could with any reason pretend to.) Every Christian truth that was necessary or expedient to be known in the church, the apostles were made acquainted with, and could certainly and infallibly distinguish it from what was error: this is another effect which is attributed to the Advocate when he should come; thus, in the forementioned verse, *when the Advocate shall come, he shall teach you all things*; and again, in the sixteenth chapter of this gospel, ver. 13, *when the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth*.

Now by virtue of those three before-named powers which were conferred by the Advocate upon the apostles, they were not only furnished completely for the preaching of the gospel, but also for the putting it into writing, (that it might be faithfully and entirely transmitted to all succeeding times,) or, at least, taking care that others should do it for them: and, accordingly, to these effects of the Holy Spirit's advocateship, to this extraordinary assistance that went along with the apostles, we owe all the books of the New Testament; which now are, and must for ever be, the rule and standard of our faith.

Fourthly and lastly, the Holy Ghost appeared as an advocate for the Christian cause, in furnishing the apostles, and other first converts to Christianity, with such extraordinary miraculous powers as could not fail to procure credit to their doctrine and preaching, and speedily to bring off the world from Judaism and heathenism to the belief of Jesus Christ, not-

withstanding all the opposition that was made there-
to by the powers of the world and kingdom of dark-
ness. We all know what a divine power our Sa-
viour was acted with, and what astonishing works
he wrought among the Jews for the proving himself
to be sent from God ; yet, says he, *Verily, verily, I
say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works
that I do he shall do also ; and greater works than
these shall he do, because I go to my Father*, John
xiv. 12. And this promise of his he made good to a
tittle after his ascension into heaven, not only to the
apostles, but to all those believers on whom they laid
their hands, as we have abundant evidence from se-
veral places in the New Testament : and here in-
deed, in these extraordinary manifestations of him-
self for the propagation of the Christian doctrine, did
the Holy Spirit most visibly and illustriously shew
himself a patron of the cause of Christ.

To reckon up the several powers of this nature
that were bestowed upon the first Christians will be
a hard task at this distance of time. Nine of them
St. Paul has joined together in one text : *To one,*
says he, *is given the word of wisdom by the Spirit ;
to another the word of knowledge by the same Spi-
rit*, 1 Cor. xii. 8 ; *to another faith by the same Spi-
rit*, ver. 9 ; (that is, such faith as our Saviour speaks of,
when he says, *If ye have faith as a grain of mustard
seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence
to yonder place ; and it shall remove ; and nothing
shall be impossible to you*, Matt. xvii. 20 ;) *to an-
other the gifts of healing by the same Spirit*, 1 Cor.
xii. 9 ; *to another the working of miracles ; to an-
other prophecy*, or foretelling things to come ; to

another discerning of spirits, or knowing people's hearts; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues, ver. 10. All these, saith he, worketh that one and the self same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will, ver. 11. These were the gifts which our Lord Jesus, when he ascended up on high, received for men, Psalm lxviii. 18. These were the gifts that his vicegerent and our advocate upon earth bestowed upon the apostles, and they to others, both clergy and laity, both men and women, so long as there was occasion for them.

What now was the result; what was the success of these strange things? Why, it is notorious to all the world; a religion that had nothing of any external charms in it; a religion, whose principal article was to believe in a crucified Saviour, and the principal reward of owning it was, in this world, only a crown of martyrdom; a religion that was preached only by poor and contemptible persons, men of no learning, no education; a religion that was opposed with the greatest malice and violence imaginable, and against which the whole power of the empire did set itself, endeavouring by all manner of arts, all manner of cruelties, to extirpate it out of the world; yet this religion, through the uncontrollable power of the Spirit, broke through all opposition, bore down all before it, spread like lightning through all places, and gained entertainment wherever it came, till at last it became the religion of the empire, and kings and princes were nursing fathers to it.

Thus powerful an advocate did the Holy Ghost shew himself for the Christian cause; and thus ef-

fectually did he make good what our Saviour had foretold of him, that he should *convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.*

2. But all this while we do not deny, nay we earnestly contend, that the Holy Ghost is still with us, as well as he was with the apostles. He still is the church's advocate, now that Christianity is planted, and there is no need of those extraordinary assistances we before spoke of: present still he is with his church, and ever will be, to all purposes that are needful either for the glory of God, or the preservation of the church, or the salvation of any man's soul.

Now, though I dare not be nice and particular in giving an account of this matter, yet these four things I dare say we may always expect and promise to ourselves from him, even to the end of the world. I shall be very brief in speaking to them.

First of all, we may be sure that as by his power and influence the church of Christ was first effectually planted in the world, so he will always take care that the church, built upon the foundation of Christ and his apostles, shall in all times and ages be continued and preserved: and in order to that, that there shall be always a succession of pastors and ministers in the church, who shall always teach all necessary, fundamental truths, and be furnished with sufficient powers and abilities for the discharge of their function, viz. for the begetting souls to Jesus Christ; and by the administration of the word and sacraments, putting them into a way of obtaining everlasting salvation. Less than this we cannot suppose to be contained in these promises of Christ, that *the gates of hell shall never prevail against his*

church, Matt. xvi. 18; and *that he*, by his Spirit, *will be with his apostles*, and their successors, *to the end of the world*, chap. xxviii. 20. But then it is to be remembered always, that it doth not follow from hence, either that any particular church is secure from error, or from other great failings; or that any particular church shall always continue to be a church: because a particular church, or a particular nation, may so reject the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and by their grievous and often repeated transgressions so affront God, as to provoke him at last to give them up, and to *remove their candlestick from them*, as St. John expresses it, Rev. ii. 5. The promise of the perpetual presence or advocateship of the Holy Spirit is only made to the church of Christ in general, not to any particular church, or member of that body; and it is only so made to the church in general, as to import that that church shall never fail from the earth; but not at all that it shall never fall into errors or corruptions.

Secondly, as the Holy Ghost, for making good the promises of Christ, will take care that there shall always be a church; (viz. several societies of men agreeing in the common faith under their lawful pastors, wherein so much Christian truth shall be taught as is necessary to salvation;) so the same Spirit will always take care to be present in the ordinances and administrations of the church, both for the enlightening the understandings of men to receive and embrace all necessary truths, and inclining their wills to practise accordingly. I dare not say of any sort of men in the world that have the essentials of Christianity among them, but that the Holy Spirit is always at hand, by his inward power

and virtue, to accompany the outward means which God hath been pleased to bestow or continue amongst them.

Thirdly, I say this further; the Holy Spirit of God never did nor ever will fail to direct and govern the lives and actions of all believers that mean honestly, and heartily devote themselves to the service of Jesus Christ. He will not fail to inspire their minds with good thoughts; to give them grace and strength to resist the temptations of the Devil; to assist them in their prayers and devotions; and whereas they *know not what they should pray for as they ought, to make intercession for them with groanings which cannot be uttered*, Rom. viii. 26; (for which reason chiefly, as some learned men have conceived, he hath the name of *Paraclete* or *Advocate* given him in scripture, namely, as the intercessor for the saints; though I am apt to think, with St. Chrysostom, that this text is rather to be understood of the extraordinary gifts of prayer in the first ages;) and to preserve them from all dangerous and destructive errors, to furnish them with sufficient powers to mortify and overcome all their evil habits and corrupt affections; and, finally, if they be compliant with his holy motions, to bring them all at last to the kingdom of heaven. I do not say that they shall be secured against all errors and against all sins; but if they be persons of probity and integrity, such as sincerely desire to know their Master's will and to do it, they shall for ever be kept from all damning errors, and for ever be secured from such snares and temptations to evil practices, as, if they were exposed to, and left to themselves, they could not avoid falling under them.

But, fourthly and lastly, while I am talking of the ordinary grace of God, and the ordinary instances of the Holy Ghost's advocateship in the world; yet I would not exclude out of that account even the extraordinary communications of God's grace and Spirit, when an extraordinary occasion offers itself. When in our days an unusual case happens, that is to say, when a particular church or a particular person is put under such difficulties, or trials, or temptations, that God Almighty sees they cannot be got over without a greater assistance of his divine power than is ordinarily bestowed; in such a case as this, I say, God will bestow all the assistance that is needful: and that assistance of the Spirit, though it be more than is usual, yet, in our case, comes under the notion of ordinary grace, or the ordinary acts of the Spirit's advocateship. Our Lord Jesus hath purchased the Holy Spirit for his disciples, not only for those of one age, but for all his followers to the world's end; and at the same time that he promised to send the Holy Ghost for the advocate, he promised that he should *abide with us for ever*, as my text hath it. There were indeed greater occasions of his appearing illustriously, visibly, and miraculously, at the beginning of Christianity, than there can be now. But if the same occasions could happen again, he would, without doubt, appear suitably to those occasions; for his power is not shortened; and we may be certain that he will never leave us nor forsake us, unless we first leave and forsake him. In the mean time let us not be dismayed at any thing; let us not doubt of his constant support and assistance. Though he do not inspire us to work miracles, or speak languages;

yet he will for ever inspire us both to believe aright and to practise aright, if we use our understandings as we ought to do, and do not wilfully depart from the known rules of our duty. And if ever it please God to expose us to extraordinary temptations, his Spirit will then extraordinarily assist us, and we shall as certainly overcome them as if we had been acted in the same way that the apostles and primitive Christians were.

I have been the more careful in distinguishing between the extraordinary and ordinary instances of the Holy Ghost's advocateship in the world, because the not attending duly to it hath brought abundance of fanaticism and enthusiasm, and other mischiefs, into the church of Christ. Whilst we are reading the New Testament, and do often there meet with such surprising things about the gifts and effects of the Holy Spirit, and do not distinguish between those that were proper and peculiar to the apostolic age, and those that were to be continued to the church for ever after, it is hardly avoidable but we must needs run into a great many mistakes; and such mistakes as have by experience been found very prejudicial both to the peace of Christendom and the salvation of men's souls.

For instance, I pray what is it that hath made so many Quakers and gifted brethren amongst us, but the misinterpreting and misapplying those texts which speak of the gifts of the Spirit, which they so understand as to make no distinction between the times then and the times now? They read, for instance, a prophecy in Joel, that when *the last days should come, God would pour his Spirit upon all flesh; and their young men should see visions, and*

their old men dream dreams, Joel ii. 28. Acts ii. 17. And again, that in those days (as the prophet Jeremy hath it) *every man shall no more teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord : for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord*, Jer. xxxi. 34. And accordingly they find the matter of fact true : for St. John speaks to all the Christians to whom he writes in these terms ; *The anointing*, says he, *which ye have received abideth in you : and ye need not that any man teach you, but the same anointing teacheth you all things, and is truth*, 1 John ii. 27. What now do they collect from these passages ? Why they conclude that in these days, which are the last days, the Spirit of God is poured upon all flesh : and every one hath a right to expect immediate impulses and revelations as to what he is to believe and to practise : that by this assistance of the Spirit every brother may understand the mysteries of the holy scriptures without the troublesome way of studying human learning ; nay, and may take upon himself the pastoral office, and become a guide and teacher of others, without any warrant from human authority, merely upon the impulse of the Spirit of God. These are the consequences that have been drawn from these and such texts of scripture. And so far have they been promoted and improved by several among us, that reason and prudence, and all acquired learning, are rather accounted by them hinderances to the work of God's church, than any ways contributing to the promoting of it. Nay, they are arrived to a pitch above the scriptures themselves, which they look upon as a dead letter in comparison

of the light within them, the witness, the anointing which they have received from above ; which is the only measure with them of truth and falsehood, and of good and evil.

I cannot deny but these enthusiastic people, that talk at this rate, have some colour for this their notion from the letter of several passages in the Old and New Testament. But then, I say, that colour would quite vanish, if they would but take care to distinguish between the effects of the Spirit that belonged to the converting of the world, and those which were to be his constant permanent operations among such as were already Christians. There is no one will deny but the apostles, and those in their times, had these inspirations, these revelations they speak of ; and the texts that they produce are some of them plain promises and predictions of them, and some of them plain proofs that those promises were made good. They did see visions, and were endued with extraordinary talents of wisdom and knowledge without human methods, and might expect particular impulses from the Holy Ghost upon every occasion that presented itself, where they wanted either light or direction : and all this was indeed little enough for the discharge of that great work they had upon their hands, viz. the bringing over the world from Judaism and heathenism to Christianity. But that being once done, and the gospel of Christ, and all things pertaining to it, being plainly left in writing by the apostles or apostolical men ; as there would from henceforward be no need of those assistances of the Spirit, so it would be a vain thing to expect them. We are not to desire these immediate revelations, nor to expect that God should

vouchsafe them to us if we prayed for them. God hath declared all his will that is necessary for us to know by our Saviour and his apostles; and the rules which they have given us, together with our own natural light and reason, and the other outward means and helps of instruction which are every day at hand among us, are sufficient, abundantly sufficient, to guide and direct us, both as to belief and practice, through all the cases and emergencies that can ordinarily happen to us. And in extraordinary cases God will take care, some way or other, that we shall not be at a loss. And therefore to pretend to the Spirit nowadays, either for preaching, or praying, or prophesying, or denouncing God's judgments, or for any other thing, in such a way as implies immediate inspiration; or to set up a light within us contrary to the light of reason, or different from the light of scripture without us; I say, to do this is such a piece of folly and freakishness, that if all of us should incline this way, it would presently render mankind fitter for a Bethlehem, or an hospital of lunatics, than to live in free society.

But I shall not pursue this point, or any other, further. Let us heartily acquiesce in that light and assistance which it hath pleased God to bestow upon us by means of his Holy Spirit. And let us always most readily and cheerfully yield obedience to all his motions, and pray constantly for his directions and assistance; devoting ourselves entirely to the service of God, in those ways which his blessed Son hath laid before us in the gospel.

A DISCOURSE

ON

EPHESIANS IV. 30.

Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption.

FOR the right understanding of what is meant by *grieving the Holy Spirit*, it is fit that we carefully distinguish between these four expressions; viz. *resisting the Spirit*; *blaspheming the Spirit*; *quenching the Spirit*; and *grieving the Spirit*. All these are scripture expressions, and denote some affront put upon the Holy Ghost, some sin committed against him. But yet they have every one of them different significations, and are used to quite different purposes, though common readers make no distinction between them. I will give you a short account of each of them, the rather, because hereby we may rectify some popular mistakes in these matters.

1. And first as to that phrase of *resisting the Spirit*; so far as we can judge of the sense of it by the context, it is spoke with respect to those who wickedly oppose the truth of God when it is declared to them. They are said *to resist the Holy Ghost*, who obstinately stand out against those means that the Spirit of God makes use of for the converting them to the true religion. Thus St. Stephen, in the seventh of the Acts, ver. 51. tells the unbelieving Jews, *Ye stiffnecked*, says he, *and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist*

the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. How was it now that their fathers resisted the Holy Ghost? Why that we may learn from what follows: they persecuted and slew the prophets whom God sent to them from time to time to declare his will to them. And how was it that they, the children, viz. the present generation, resisted the Holy Ghost? Why, in that, notwithstanding the powerful miracles that Jesus Christ and his apostles wrought among them by the Spirit, they still continued infidels and opposers of the gospel: this was their *resisting the Spirit*: from whence we may gather that it is not every disobedience, or noncompliance with a good motion that is made in our souls, that may be called a *resisting of the Spirit*; but it must be a wilful, perverse, obstinate opposing of God's truth that doth deserve that name.

2. In the second place, as for blaspheming or speaking against the Holy Ghost, that is a degree higher than this, for it implies, not only the not being convinced by the miracles that were wrought for the proof of Christ's religion; but further, by slandering or calumniating the Spirit by which they were wrought, saying, that he was not the Spirit of God, but *Beelzebub the prince of the devils*, Mark iii. 22. This was the sin of the Pharisees; and it appeared so heinous in the eyes of our Saviour, that he declares, that whosoever *shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: because they said, he hath an unclean spirit*, ver. 29, 30. So that without doubt that famous sin, which we call *the sin against the Holy Ghost*, and which is looked upon as unpardonable, is nothing else but our at-

tributing the miracles of Christ to the power of the Devil. From whence we may judge whether any of those people among us, who are apt to fancy they have committed that sin, can possibly be guilty of it.

3. As to the phrase of *quenching the Spirit*, we meet with it among the precepts and advices that St. Paul gives to the Thessalonians, 1 Epist. v. 19, 20. *Quench not the Spirit, despise not prophecies*. It is plain he speaks this of those who were already Christians; but yet not with respect to the sanctifying gifts of the Spirit of God, which all Christians were partakers of, but with respect to the extraordinary, miraculous effusions of the Spirit, which were given to some Christians in those days. The meaning of the precept is, that they who had these extraordinary gifts of the Spirit conferred upon them should be very careful that they did not lose them, that they did not die in them. He useth this term of *quenching*, because the Holy Spirit is in scripture called *a fire*; and when he came upon the apostles he came *in the likeness of fire*. And accordingly, as he here talks of *quenching the Spirit*, so he elsewhere speaks of *stirring up the Spirit*, 2 Tim. i. 6. alluding in both expressions to the notion of *fire*: certain it is, as a fire must be stirred up and recruited, otherwise it will in a little time be extinguished, so it was with those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit in those days. The men that had them were concerned to be wonderfully careful in the exercise of them; never to let them lie idle and unemployed in their hands; nor to make use of them to any selfish, worldly purpose. It concerned them likewise to be frequent in prayer; to be strict

and severe in their lives ; to mind the cause of God above all things, otherwise God would withdraw those assistances of the Spirit from them. The Spirit would perfectly be extinguished in them, and they wholly lose the power of working miracles and speaking languages, which before they were endowed with. This is the meaning of *quenching the Spirit* ; which being so, we cannot but take notice how impertinently this phrase is used by a great many in our days. A man that addresses himself to God in a form of prayer, and doth not use his extemporary faculty, is, by some sort of people among us, said to *quench the Spirit*. But certainly this is quite wide of the expression as St. Paul used it ; unless we could make it appear that every one who talks to God in a sudden extemporary way, without premeditation, was supernaturally and immediately inspired from heaven so to do, and was as much acted by the divine Spirit as the apostles were in their miraculous performances ; which, for my part, I think it a hard matter to believe of any pretenders to inspiration among us.

4. As for the last phrase, that of *grieving the Spirit*, which we here meet with in my text, I come now, in the last place, to consider it. And I conceive that this phrase is not used with respect to those who are infidels, as the terms of *resisting the Spirit* and *blaspheming the Spirit* are used ; nor with respect to the miraculous, extraordinary effects which were visible in many places and persons in the first times of Christianity, which the term of *quenching the Spirit* doth refer to ; but it is a precept given to those who have already taken the profession of Christianity upon themselves ; and it is spoken with respect

to the sanctifying gifts and graces of the Spirit, viz. those communications of the Spirit which were not peculiar to the first times, but common to all believers to the world's end. The Spirit of God is here considered as a guest that hath taken up his lodging in our hearts, at least as one that desires to be our guest; as having acquired a right and title to us by virtue of the contract and covenant we made with God in our baptism, and undertaking the vows of Christianity. And under this notion of a guest or lodger we are bound not to grieve him, not to afflict him, or make him sad, (for so the original *Μὴ λυπεῖτε* signifies,) *Ne contristate Spiritum*, says the vulgar Latin very properly; that is, to be careful that we give him no offence, not to do any thing that shall displease him, or by any unkind usage of ours make him weary of his habitation, and give him occasion to remove from us. His meaning is for evermore to dwell with us; as indeed he is the very principle of the life of a Christian, and we cannot live as Christians without him. It is not more necessary to the constituting of a man, that a human soul inhabit in a human body, than it is to the being a true Christian that the holy Spirit of God inhabit in the soul and body of the man. It is true, the holy Spirit of God doth not dwell actually in all who profess Christianity; but then it is true, that all who profess Christianity are not true Christians. But this is certain, that it is every professor's own fault that the Spirit doth not dwell within him. It is certain, that he is ready and willing so to do, and for this purpose, so long as men have not sinned to such a degree that God thinks fit to give them over to hardness of heart, he fails not, as there is opportunity, to suggest good

motions to their souls. As he affords them the outward means of salvation, the word and sacraments, so he accompanies those outward means with his inward grace and influence. And if they themselves do not prevent his operations in them, he will effectually at last, by the destruction of their sins, work himself a room and place in their hearts; and lodge there for ever, if they do not dislodge him. And indeed this is the very whole design of the gospel of Christ, to unite us to himself by the means of the Holy Spirit; to plant in us a new nature; to possess us with a principle of life higher and more divine than that which we received from our parents. By being called to Christianity, we are called to be the perpetual receptacles and temples of the divinity. This honour and dignity, by our undertaking the Christian profession, we are designed for, and whosoever doth his part towards it is actually made partaker of it. And no man can pretend to any benefit by his Christianity in whom the Spirit of God doth not thus dwell. For this we have abundant evidence all along from what our Saviour and his apostles taught us. This is the meaning of all those places that set forth the union between Christ and his church, making him to be *the Head*, and Christians *the members*. This is that which our Saviour saith in the fifteenth of St. John, ver. 5, 6. *I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast out as a withered branch.* There is the same relation between Christ and Christians, that there is between the vine and the branches: the same necessity of communication of vital influences

from the root to the branch in the one as in the other: which communication of influences is made by the holy Spirit of God, derived from Christ, and diffusing himself into every particular member of the whole body of Christians. Hence it is, Christians are so frequently called *the temples of the Holy Ghost*: *Know ye not*, says St. Paul, 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. *that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.* vi. 15. And again, ver. 19. *Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?* which he explains presently after, thus; *Know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?* And the same St. Paul, in the eighth to the Romans, ver. 9, 10, 11, &c. lays the foundation of our relation to Christ, and our hopes of eternal life, in this very thing, viz. the Spirit of God his dwelling in us; as may be there seen more at large.

This then being the privilege of all Christians, that by their being consecrated to Christ they have a right to the continual presence of the Holy Ghost in their souls; or, if you will, God hath so great a right and property in them, that he sends down his Holy Spirit to take possession of them, in order to the securing and sealing them for his own in the other world; we may easily from hence gather what it is *to grieve the Holy Spirit*, (which is the thing we are now inquiring into;) viz. we then grieve him, when, being already Christians in profession, we either will not vouchsafe him a lodging in our hearts, which he doth desire; and, in order to the obtaining

it, makes frequent applications to our souls by his holy motions: or, when we have already given him entertainment, we carry ourselves so unbecomingly towards him, as to tempt him to forsake us. We then *grieve the Holy Spirit*, when, having taken upon ourselves the covenant of baptism, and thereby consecrated and consigned ourselves to God, we either refuse to admit the Spirit to take possession of us, or, having admitted him, do not shew that respect, nor observe that decency, nor express that kindness that is due to so worthy a guest; but, by our rude and unmannerly and ill-natured behaviour towards him, put such affronts upon him, as highly provoke him to quit his habitation.

Having thus explained the meaning of the precept, and shewn you the foundation upon which it is built, I cannot but make a reflection or two upon what hath been said, before I pass any further.

1. And first, how ought the consideration of this to affect us! What are we, poor creatures, that God should design to take up his habitation in our souls! and yet we see he is pleased to do so. God doth more really inhabit in every pious soul, and vouchsafe his presence there, than he doth in any temples or churches dedicated to his service. O what a mighty honour and happiness is hereby conferred upon our natures! The highest angels of heaven cannot boast of greater privileges than we enjoy. O what an argument is here to make us infinitely careful and solicitous and jealous over ourselves! What a shame and disdain should the sense of this infuse in us to mingle and communicate with any impure thing! with what an ardent desire and zeal and resolution should this inspire us to perform all

noble and brave and extraordinary actions for the cause of God ! The Holy Spirit is pleased to take up his residence within us. How pure and spotless, how untainted with worldly lusts and sensual affections ought we to preserve our hearts ! how shall we dare to let any unclean thing approach so sacred a place, unless we could suppose that *light can have fellowship with darkness*, or that *God can have communion with Belial* ! The Holy Spirit is pleased to dwell with us, and to dwell with us for ever, if we banish him not. How ought this to refresh us under all afflictions, support us under all temptations, animate and encourage us in the most dangerous adventures that we are called out unto ! How can we despair of victory in all our contests against the world, the flesh, and the Devil, when we have one so mighty to save ready at hand upon all occasions ! how can we want relief in the greatest extremities, when the fountain of joy and consolation has taken up his lodging in our souls !

2. But, secondly, let us take occasion from hence to admire the infinite love and affection and tenderness that the holy Spirit of God bears towards us. *Grieve not the Holy Spirit.*—The words intimate a sense of grief and trouble in him, when we shew any unkindness to him : he seems to be afflicted and made sad when we behave ourselves frowardly and perversely towards him. It is true, there are no passions, properly speaking, in the divine nature ; nor can the Holy Spirit be capable either of joy or grief, or any other human affection : but all these things are attributed to God by way of compliance with our infirmities, who are not wont to be so deeply affected with things, unless they be conveyed

to us in such a way as we ourselves have experience of. But this is certain, that as from the terms of God's fury and indignation, and the like, we may safely conclude the infinite aversion that is in his nature to all sin and wickedness; so from such phrases as these, of his repenting of the evil, of his pitying and having compassion on his creatures, of his being grieved and made sad by the injuries that are done to him, we may conclude the infinite love and good-will he bears to mankind. If therefore the consideration of the infiniteness of his majesty who dwelleth within us, will not prevail upon us to treat him with respect and reverence; yet one would think, if we had any ingenuity, that the sense of the unkindness that he takes when he is ill-treated by us should work upon us. Will the holy blessed God vouchsafe to be grieved for such a worm as I am, when I refuse his kindness, and will not comply with his love? and shall not I be grieved for my own ingratitude? Can I be so impudent as to live in a daily course of forgetfulness of God, and transgressing his laws, when by so doing I do not only affront his sovereignty and greatness, but also sin against the greatest kindness and tenderness that ever was conceived in any breast? A kindness so great that it cannot be expressed; the best words to set it out are borrowed from our passions and tenderest sense of things that we have; but, alas! they fall infinitely short of truly expressing the love that God bears to us. O therefore let us think upon this! Let us consider what it is only to grieve or afflict by our unkindness any one that is our friend, and who hath by all instances of goodness endeavoured to deserve well of us. Human nature can-

not bear the thoughts of having disoblged such an one without a sensible trouble. O, then, how can we with patience endure to think of grieving the Holy Spirit, who, as he is without comparison the best friend we are capable of having, (as he hath done more for us, and is ready to do more for us than we can either expect or imagine,) so is he pleased to express his resentment of our unkindness in so tender and affectionate a manner, as if he was one of our own nature ; nay, joined in the nearest relation and friendship to us.

But I leave this, to shew, in the next place, what those things are by which the Holy Spirit is grieved.

Now in general it may be said, that our sins, and they only, are the things which do grieve the Holy Spirit. There is nothing in the world in us but sin that can give him any displeasure. Neither the infirmities of our nature, nor the circumstances of our condition in the world, nor our manifold temptations, nor persecutions, nor distresses, nor any thing in us or about us, *can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus*. It is only sin : a wilful swerving from the rules that God hath set us, and by which the Holy Spirit desires to govern us, that can give him occasion of offence. For this is the only thing in the world that is contradictory to his nature, and to the ends for which he is pleased to dwell within us. But though this be the general answer to the inquiry, yet, for the impressing the thing the more upon the mind, I shall branch it out into four particulars, pursuing the metaphor of the text, which supposes the Holy Spirit to be a guest or a lodger in our hearts.

1. And, first of all, we grieve the Holy Spirit

when we neglect him, when we behave ourselves with carelessness and indifference towards him. It must needs trouble any guest to see that he who entertains him, though he doth not openly affront him, yet doth not shew him that respect he deserves, nor takes care to please him in all things. This very thing is a kind of slighting of him ; and the same slight we put upon the Holy Ghost, when we do not heartily give up ourselves to be governed by him in all things ; when we do not diligently attend to his holy motions, and vigorously pursue them ; but, on the contrary, live careless and idle lives, suffering the good thoughts that God is daily suggesting to our minds, to die in us without any effect. This must needs grieve the Holy Spirit, for it is a plain evidence that we neglect him. If we had that regard for him that we ought, we should not suffer that care he takes of us, and that he hath of our good, to be thus utterly without effect ; but we should be watchful over ourselves, and be continually looking into our own hearts, and seeing how things went there, and improve every opportunity, every good motion that the Spirit affords us, to our advancement in virtue and goodness. It is not enough that we live without doing any great hurt in the world, that we are not guilty of grievous and scandalous crimes ; but we must be heartily and sincerely good, and we must be daily growing better and better. This is the end of the Spirit's dwelling within us : and if we do not make use of his presence to this end, we shall provoke him at length to forsake us, and give us up as trifling souls, upon whom no good is to be done.

2. But, secondly, as we grieve the Holy Spirit by

our carelessness and indifference, and not attending to his holy motions ; so we do yet more grieve him by every act of wilful, deliberate sin ; or by sinning against our conscience, either in single acts, or in a habit of any sin. Sins of ignorance and inadvertency, sins that we fall into unawares and through surprise, the Holy Spirit will bear with ; but the indulging of any one sin in the course of our lives, or the committing any one act of sin against our natural light, wilfully, deliberately, when the Holy Spirit within us testifies to us that we ought not to do such a thing ; I say, this is so high an affront put upon the blessed Spirit, that it is not to be borne withal : it is a downright violation of all the laws of hospitality ; it is a betraying our guest, and taking part with his open enemies. And what guest will not forsake his habitation when he is thus treated ? O therefore, as we love our souls, let us have a care of these sins ; let us do nothing against our conscience ; let us never willingly and deliberately do a thing that we know to be evil. It is not to be told how much by any such actions as these we wound our own souls, and what misery we bring upon ourselves. This is the certain way to drive away the Holy Spirit from us ; and if ever he do return again, it must be upon a very severe and particular repentance.

3. Thirdly, though all sins do grieve the Holy Spirit, and wilful sins most ; yet there are some sins that have a mark set upon them in the scripture, as being of such a nature as to grieve the Holy Spirit in a more particular manner than others : and these are the sins that are more immediately committed against our bodies. Such are all sorts of unclean-

ness and intemperance. The Spirit of God is a Spirit of purity; and therefore nothing so opposite to him as all fleshly pollutions and sensuality. Indeed the very notion of his being a guest and lodger with us supposeth that we are obliged in a more particular manner to take care that our hearts, where he is to dwell, should be thoroughly purged from every thing that is filthy and unclean. And this is the very argument that St. Paul uses to the Corinthians, to make them especially careful to avoid fornication and other uncleanness; namely, because their bodies were *the temples of the Holy Ghost*. *The body*, says he, *is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body*. 1 Cor. vi. 13. *Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid*. ver. 15. *Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth, is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body*. ver. 18. And ye know that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own. ver. 19. And in the text we are now upon, when St. Paul bids us not to *grieve the Spirit*, he seems to have an especial regard to the grieving him by wantonness and uncleanness, by lewd and scurrilous discourses. This the context plainly intimates: for in the verse before he gives them this caution; *Let no corrupt communication*, says he, *proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers*. Ephes. iv. 29. And then it follows in the text, *Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God*. And what we say of lust and un-

cleanness, the same is to be said of gluttony and drunkenness; for these are as noisome and offensive to the Holy Spirit as the other, and render the man who is guilty of them every whit as incapable of his divine inspirations. Indeed the Spirit of God cannot lodge in a soul that is impure and sensual in any kind: and therefore, if ever we expect *to be sealed to the day of redemption*, it will infinitely concern us all to *keep our bodies pure and undefiled, to possess them in sanctification and honour*, 1 Thess. iv. 4. A man that is given to lust or drunkenness is no more capable of receiving or lodging the Holy Spirit, than a sty is fit to be made a temple.

4. But, fourthly and lastly, as there are some particular sins, so there are some particular circumstances of sins that do likewise grieve him in a more especial manner than others. Now of these circumstances, this I cannot but take notice of as a chief one, viz. our continuing to pursue a sinful course of life after we have often engaged ourselves by solemn vows and resolutions to forsake it. There is nothing more hated by God or man than the sin of unfaithfulness and ingratitude. The best friend in the world, if time after time we abuse his kindnesses, if upon every turn when we have need of him we solemnly engage to him to do this or the other thing that he would have us; and yet, when that turn is served, we forget all our promises and engagements, and fall again to that practice that we know will above all things in the world disoblige him; I say, in such a case as this, the best friend in the world will without scruple shake off all thoughts of friendship with us, and have nothing more to do with persons who are so ungrateful and perfidious. It is a

matter of great comfort to us, that the patience and kindness of God doth so infinitely exceed that of the best friends upon earth: but yet our baseness and treachery and inconstancy, in a customary breach of vows and promises, I say, these things will (if any thing in the world can) provoke God Almighty to abandon us, and leave us to ourselves. The holy Spirit of God will strive with us for a long time; but God hath told us, that *his Spirit shall not always strive with us*, Gen. vi. 3. We may, by our frequent backslidings, after our solemn engagements to the contrary, so *weary* him, (if I may speak in scripture language, Isa. vii. 13. Jer. xv. 6. Mal. ii. 17.) that he may think fit to give us up. However, it is certain that every man that is thus false and treacherous takes the most ready course in the world to bring this judgment upon himself.

And so much it may suffice to have spoken upon the precept itself, *Grieve not the holy Spirit of God*.

I come now to the other part of my text, viz. the argument wherewith St. Paul enforces this precept; and that is, the consideration that it is the Spirit *that sealeth us unto the day of redemption*. In speaking to which words, I must first inquire what is meant by *the day of redemption*.

Secondly, What is meant by being *sealed unto the day of redemption*. And,

Thirdly, How, or in what sense, the Holy Spirit doth thus seal Christians. From all which it will appear what a mighty argument the consideration of this ought to be to us, *not to grieve the Spirit*.

I. And first let us inquire what is meant by *the day of redemption*. The writers of the New Tes-

tament speak of a fourfold redemption which Christ hath wrought for us; viz. a redemption from the law; a redemption from the guilt and punishment of sin; a redemption from the dominion and power of sin; and a redemption from the grave.

1. I shall speak a word or two upon each of these particulars. The scriptures speak of a redemption from the law: *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith*, Gal. iii. 13, 14. And again, *When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*, Gal. iv. 4, 5. The Jews were properly and immediately concerned in this redemption from the law; for none were under the law (viz. obliged to obedience to it, or obnoxious to the curses of it) but they to whom it was given: and this redemption consisted in this, that Christ, by his death, did wholly put an end to the Mosaical covenant, so that the Jews were no longer under the obligation to the law, nor subject to the inconveniences it brought upon them. And justly might this be called a redemption; for it was a restoration of that people from a *state of bondage* into a *state of liberty*, Gal. iv. 5, 31. So long as they were under that covenant, (viz. the dispensation of the law,) they were in a servile condition, *rather servants than sons*, ver. 1, 2, 3, 5; nor was it possible for them, by means of the law, to attain to justification, or a state of God's favour and acceptance, Rom. iii. 20. But Christ, by putting an end

to this covenant, set on foot a better ; viz. the evangelical, that was first made with Adam, and then with Abraham, four hundred and thirty years before the law, Gal. iii. 17. which, as it gave better conditions, (requiring only faith and repentance instead of many cumbersome ceremonies,) so it was *established upon better promises*, Heb. viii. 6. making over to us not only the pardon of our sins and the assistances of the Spirit, but eternal rewards in another world. So that to be redeemed from the law was indeed an inestimable privilege.

But it may be asked, How doth this redemption concern us Gentiles, since we were never under the law ? I answer, It doth concern us infinitely ; and the benefit we have received hereby is as great as that was to them. It is true, we cannot properly be said *to be redeemed from the curse of the law*, because we were never obnoxious to it ; (*for what the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law*, Rom. iii. 19 ;) but then we were in as bad a condition, or worse ; for we were left in our pure naturals, in that low, degenerate state in which we came into the world ; though we were not subject to the maledictions contained in the law, yet we were subject to that death which was the general punishment threatened to the disobedient under the law, and was the curse and sentence denounced against Adam and his posterity. And we had no more light or means to approve ourselves to God, or to attain to a state of justification or salvation, than the Jews themselves had under the law ; nay, indeed, not near so much. But now Christ's redeeming the Jews from the curse of the law, and entering them into a new covenant, or rather renewing the *old co-*

venant of the gospel made with Abraham, became justification and salvation to us Gentiles also, Gal. iii. 20, &c. 1 Cor. i. 30. For so had God ordered the matter in his dispensation of times and seasons, that when the Mosaical covenant should be abrogated, (*which was a wall of separation and partition between the Jews and Gentiles*, Eph. ii. 14.) and the evangelical covenant take place in the stead thereof, then should the Gentiles also be *adopted into God's family*, and *they which were before strangers and aliens* should become equally his sons and heirs with them who had before been his peculiar people, Rom. xi. Eph. ii. 12, 13, 19. Gal. iv. 5. And this is the *great mystery* that St. Paul so often speaks of, Rom. xi. 33, &c. Christ, when he put an end to the covenant of the law, brought both Jews and Gentiles into one and the same new covenant; and gave to both the same promises and the same means and the same hopes of salvation, so that the one had no advantage above the other, Eph. iii. 6. And upon this account it is that we find St. Paul mentioning the redemption of the Jews from the law as a matter that did nearly concern, and much redound to the benefit of the Gentiles, as particularly in the two texts above cited; *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ*; and what this blessing of Abraham was, the next words shew; *that we*, viz. both Jews and Gentiles, *might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith*, Gal. iii. 13, 14. The promise of the Spirit was one of the great privileges of the evangelical covenant which was made with Abraham. And this promise was not made over to the Jews by their law; but when that law

was abrogated by Christ, then that promise was made good both to them and to the Gentiles. And to the same purpose speaks that other passage I quoted, *The Son of God was sent to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*, Gal. iv. 5; viz. he was sent to redeem the Jews from their bondage, that from thenceforward Jews and Gentiles might be no longer discriminated, but all might be made heirs of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

I have dwelt the longer upon this head, to give some light to those texts which relate to the redemption from the law; because it is a point which is generally little understood, and consequently much misrepresented. Nor indeed can there be any good sense in the notion of this redemption, unless we take along with us the key that I have given; but with the help of this we may clear up several passages in St. Paul's Epistles, which are commonly thought very obscure and difficult.

And it appears, from what has been said, that this redemption from the law is so far from being an inconsiderable thing with respect to us of the Gentile world, that it is the foundation of all the other three redemptions that remain to be spoken to; viz. from the guilt of sin, from the power of it, and from the grave, or the power of death: all these follow upon it; or it is the general under which these particulars are contained. For you see that the notion of redemption from the law, as that term is used in scripture, doth not only imply the abrogation of the first covenant of the law, but takes into it the establishing a new covenant both with Jews and Gentiles. Now the promises made over in this new covenant

are neither more nor fewer than these three : first, the pardon of sin, which is the very same thing with redemption from the guilt of sin. Secondly, the assistance and graces of the Spirit, which are the same thing with the second redemption from the power of sin. And, thirdly, eternal salvation of body and soul in the other world, which is the last redemption I mentioned, viz. from the grave. So that our redemption from the law doth virtually contain in it all the others.

2. But however, for the clearing the text, it is fit that something should be said to each particular. In the second place, therefore, when the scripture speaks of the redemption that was wrought for us by Jesus Christ, sometimes by that term is meant a deliverance from our sins, viz. from the guilt and punishment of them. Thus is the word used in Eph. i. 7. and Coloss. i. 14. in both which texts we meet with this passage ; (where the apostle is speaking of Jesus Christ ;) *In whom, says he, we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.* Christ by his death procured for all believers the remission of all their sins, bought off the punishment that was due to them ; so that no true disciple of his shall ever be called to an account for them in another world. And this is that notion of redemption that doth commonly obtain among us. When we speak of Christ as our Redeemer, we mean it with relation to his dying for our sins, or making such satisfaction to God for them, that we, upon the account thereof, are acquitted or justified, though this be indeed only one branch of our redemption.

3. For, in the third place, Christ came as much

to redeem us from the dominion of our sins, as from the guilt of them. It was never his design that a wicked man should be justified before God, and continue still wicked: but he was sent as well to destroy sin in our mortal bodies, (to subdue it so by the power of the Spirit, that it should not reign in us,) as he was sent to deliver us from the dreadful consequences of it, viz. the punishments of another life, which would otherwise have fallen upon us. And this is another notion of redemption that we meet with in scripture; as for instance, *Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*, Titus ii. 14. In this place it is plain that Christ's redemption of us is the enabling us to mortify all our lusts and evil habits, and to become holy and virtuous livers; that as before we were the slaves of sin and of the Devil, so we should from henceforward walk as the freemen of Jesus Christ.

4. But then, besides these three notions of redemption already mentioned, there is also a fourth in the New Testament, and which indeed is the consummation of all the rest, without which they would not have been complete; and that is, the eternal glorification both of our souls and bodies at the last appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we were obnoxious to eternal punishment for our sins, which Christ by his death redeemed us from; as likewise we were the slaves and vassals of sin, which slavery Christ, by sending his holy Spirit, redeemed us from; so after these redemptions were wrought, there still remained a fourth, viz. the redemption of our bodies from the grave, and the uniting them

with our souls in perfect happiness. And this to be effected by that Spirit which raised up Jesus from the dead at the day of the general resurrection. Now in this sense, as well as in the other fore-named, we have the word *redemption* frequently used in the New Testament; as Heb. ix. 12. *Christ by entering into the holy place*, (that is, the highest heavens,) *hath obtained eternal redemption for us*: that is to say, our Saviour ascending up into heaven with his body, to sit at the right hand of God for evermore, is an evidence to us that he hath obtained an eternal redemption for us: and he is a pledge and assurance to us, that our bodies shall be redeemed from the grave, and live in heaven eternally with him. This likewise is the notion of redemption, in the eighth chapter to the Romans, ver. 23; there, says the apostle, *we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body*. Where you may observe, that that consummation of happiness at the general day of judgment, which St. Paul and other Christians here waited for, and groaned after, is called by two names; first, *the adoption*, or *sonship*: and the reason of this name is clear, because Christians are not, and shall not be completely manifested to be the sons of God, till they be made partakers of the resurrection. For this we have our Saviour's express authority, who, speaking of those who shall be *thought worthy of the rewards of the other world in that day*, tells us, *that they are the children of God, being* (or because they are) *the children of the resurrection*, Luke xx. 36. Rom. viii. 19. The other term, by which that state of future

happiness is expressed, is *the redemption of the body*; which is a very proper expression. As for our souls, they were redeemed before, by being delivered from the power of sin, and from the eternal punishment consequent upon it; and to no other kinds of death were they obnoxious. But our bodies are not redeemed till that glorious happy day, when they shall be restored from the grave to live for ever with the soul in unspeakable happiness. Another text, wherein the word *redemption* is taken in that notion we are speaking of, is in the first chapter to the Ephesians, ver. 13, 14, where the apostle saith, *after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession*: in which text there is no difficulty, when we know what is meant by *the purchased possession*, or, as it is rendered in the margin, *peculiar treasure*. And, without doubt, this must be understood of the church, the whole body of faithful Christians, whom Christ purchased with his blood; upon which account they may truly be called his *purchased possession*, or his *peculiar treasure*, as the Israelites were called by God after he had brought them out of Egypt, Exodus xix. 5. Psalm cxxxv. 4. Well then, if *the redemption of the purchased possession* be no more than the redemption of the church, or the whole body of Christians; then the plain sense of the place is, that God gives us his holy Spirit as an *earnest of that inheritance* which he will bestow upon us at the general redemption of the church, which will be at the day of the resurrection. And there is no doubt but this passage and my text are directly parallel, and

mean the same thing. No doubt but the redemption here must be the same with the redemption there; viz. not any redemption that is past or present, but that of Christians, which is yet to come at the general judgment. In truth, there is no other notion of redemption that will fit the place; and of this it is that our Lord himself seems to speak, where, having mentioned the signs that should precede his approach to judgment, he says, *When ye see these things come to pass, then lift up your heads, and look up; for your redemption draweth nigh*, Luke xxi. 28.

Having thus given a particular account of the several notions of redemption, and shewn from thence how we are to understand *the day of redemption* in my text; let us, in the next place, inquire what is meant by *being sealed to this day of redemption*: of which I shall speak more briefly.

II. A seal hath always been used for two especial purposes; either for the confirmation of covenants and contracts between God and man, or for marking any thing for one's own. Now to either of these uses of a seal we may suppose the apostle to allude, when he says that *we are sealed by the Spirit*. If we take it in the former notion, then the sense is this; that as it is the custom amongst men, to confirm their agreements and covenants by mutually setting their seals to the instruments wherein the articles of them are recorded, so God having made a covenant with all faithful Christians, wherein he promises to give them eternal life in the other world, he is pleased to ratify this covenant, and the promises therein made on his part, by sending down the Holy Spirit into their hearts; which is the strongest

assurance that he can possibly give, that he sincerely intends to make good to us what he has promised, and that on his side the contract is inviolable. And such a seal hath God set to this covenant of Christianity, as hath infinitely the preeminence above the seal of the Jewish covenant that was before it, and gives greater security to us that God will perform it. The seal of that covenant was only an outward seal, an external mark in the flesh, viz. circumcision: but this is an inward seal, a seal in the heart and mind. The Israelites were sealed in their flesh to the possession of the earthly land of Canaan; but Christians are sealed in the inward man by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon their minds, to the possession of that *inheritance that is eternal in the heavens*. But we may well suppose that the apostle doth by this phrase of *sealing* allude to the other use of a seal, as it was and is still used by merchants and men of trade, viz. as a declaration of their right and propriety in a thing. Thus it was the custom of those persons, [that] whatever commodity was bought by them, or consigned to them, to have their seal or mark put upon it, whereby it might be distinguished from all others, and known to be theirs only: nay, in those times they did not only set their seal upon goods, but upon persons too, whom they bought or had any property in. And accordingly, in allusion to this, we find in the Revelations, that the true worshippers of Jesus Christ, that were to be saved in the midst of the judgments and calamities that were to fall upon the antichristian churches, are said to have the seal of God on their foreheads; and, on the other side, they who belonged to the beast, who were subjects of Antichrist, are said

to have the mark of the beast upon them. And in this sense the phrase is used even of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is said *to be sealed by the Father*, John vi. 27. viz. God, by his sending the Holy Spirit down upon him at his baptism, did declare to all the world that Jesus Christ was owned by him. And in this sense all Christians may be truly said to be *sealed by the Holy Spirit to the day of redemption*; that is, God by giving them the Spirit hath marked them for his own; they have an evidence in themselves that they belong to him, and that they shall certainly have their portion in the resurrection of the just. And this I take to be the full meaning of the phrase in my text, of *being sealed*.

III. My third and last inquiry is, How, and in what sense, the Spirit doth seal us to that day. There are three notions of it:

The first of which is very false, though commonly received:

The second is true, but yet not full; nor, I suppose, principally intended in this place:

And therefore I conceive the third is to be preferred.

1. The first account of the Spirit's sealing is this. We commonly take the Spirit's sealing us to the day of redemption to be his testifying to our hearts that God is reconciled to us, and hath forgiven us all our sins. We fancy that he doth as it were whisper it into our ears; we seem to hear a voice within us that bids us be of good comfort, for God hath accepted us. Now when we have these suggestions, we believe that then the Spirit doth seal us, and *witness with our spirit*: but when we find our minds cloudy and melancholy, so that we think not

so well of ourselves, then we believe that we are in a state of desertion, that God hath forsaken us, and refuses to seal us with the Holy Ghost. Now, according to this notion, the sense of my text must be, Have a care that you do not grieve the Holy Spirit ; for if you do, he will not testify to your minds that you are the children of God, but you shall be in a very doubtful and uncertain condition, and want all that comfort and joy in the Holy Ghost, which otherwise you might have. But to this I say, that though I doubt not but that God sometimes, and in some particular cases, is pleased to manifest his goodness to the souls of pious persons in an extraordinary manner, and to fill them with inexpressible joy and consolation, and to possess them with an undoubted assurance of their eternal happiness, more particularly at the hour of death, or in a time of difficult trials, especially in the case of martyrdom ; yet I deny utterly that this is the sealing of the Spirit spoken of in the text ; and that for these reasons ; first of all, there is no text of scripture that gives countenance to such an interpretation of the sealing of the Spirit ; for all those that I know of place his sealing in his being within us, and not in his suggesting to our minds a good opinion of ourselves : and thus it is we must interpret that famous text of St. Paul, Rom. viii. 16. *of the Spirit's witnessing with our spirits, that we are the sons of God* ; as any one will be convinced who carefully examines the context, and considers the occasion upon which these words are made use of.

Secondly, it is nowhere promised by God in scripture, that men shall ordinarily have that testimony of the goodness of their condition that this notion

implieth, and consequently the sealing of the Spirit cannot consist in it. The ordinary way of coming to an assurance of our future happiness is, by reasoning with our own hearts, examining and comparing our lives and actions with the rule that Christ hath given us to walk by. If our consciences, upon such an examination, give us in evidence that we have sincerely performed the conditions of the Christian covenant required on our parts, viz. that we do truly believe and repent ; then we may conclude that we are in a safe and good condition. I say, this is the way that the scripture chalketh out to us for the gaining of assurance ; (Lament. iii. 40. Gal. vi. 4. 2 Cor. xiii. 5 ;) and no man can come to it otherwise, unless God be pleased to deal with him in an extraordinary and miraculous way, which, I suppose, every one is not to expect.

Thirdly, if the sealing of the Spirit be the Spirit's possessing our minds with a strong persuasion that our sins are forgiven, what will become of them who never had this strong persuasion, and yet, for all that, are very honest and sincere and devout Christians ? There are a great many in the world who truly desire and endeavour to serve God as well as they can, and live honest and virtuous lives, and hope well too in the mercies of God, but yet have none of those extraordinary overflowing consolations of the Spirit that this notion supposeth : nay, many of them are frequently apt to distrust their own condition, as thinking they are not so good as they should be ; nay, and perhaps they may die in that opinion. What shall we say of such ? that they are not *sealed by the Spirit to the day of redemption* ? God forbid ! I should much less doubt of the happi-

ness of such a person in the world to come, though I saw him go out of this world unsatisfied as to his future state, than I should of one who had those sweet and comfortable inspirations of his being the child of God, if I saw that he had been less careful in his life and conversation than the other.

But, fourthly, that strong assurance which we sometimes feel in our minds that we are in a good condition, cannot be the Spirit's sealing to the day of redemption upon this account ; that, at this rate, the Spirit's sealing us would be no seal of God at all ; viz. it would be a very fallible seal, and the man who had it might for all that be in a miserable condition. The plain English is, that there is nothing in this persuasion or confidence of our good condition, (unless it be fetched from some other ground than this strong impulse on our minds,) but what a very wicked man may have as well as the best. A wicked man may at some times, and in some humours, especially when his brains are heated, and his blood runs quick in his veins, and he hath for some time vigorously bent his mind to the applying of Christ's righteousness to his own soul ; I say, in such a fit of devotion as this, he may easily be brought to fancy himself as true a believer and as great a saint as the best of them ; though in the mean time there is no real, lasting change made upon his heart, but when the heat is over, he becomes the same man he was before. All that I mean is this, that, if there be no other notion of the seal of the Spirit of God but this that I am speaking against, it may oftentimes prove no more than a strong fancy ; and the person that will the most easily come by this seal will not be he who studies to

serve God best, but he who hath the most lively and brisk imagination ; which is, in effect, to make the seal of the Spirit of God a foundation for all the enthusiasm in the world.

2. But, secondly, leaving this extravagant notion of the seal of the Spirit, let us come to a more sober and justifiable one. Many very learned interpreters do conceive that *the Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption*, is to be understood of those extraordinary, miraculous effusions of the Spirit which were vouchsafed to the Christians of the apostles' time, for the quicker spreading and the greater confirmation of the Christian religion ; all which gifts of the Spirit are ceased in our days. Now, according to this notion of the Spirit, the sense of the text is this ; that the Spirit of God, which was in this manner poured forth upon the apostles and the other Christians in their days, was a seal and an evidence to them and to all the world that the Christians were the children of God, that he owned their cause, that he acknowledged them for his people, and would reward them at the day of the general retribution ; nay, these works of the Spirit were not only a seal to the Christians of those days, but to us at this time, and will be so to the end of the world. For the works that were then done are a confirmation to us at this day of the truth of Christianity, and a seal that God hath set to the evangelical covenant, that he will make good the promises of the gospel to the whole succession of believers for ever. This now, it cannot be denied, is a very true sense of the Spirit's sealing, and ought by no means to be refused or excluded ; but yet I conceive it is not the full sense of the words,

nor the sense principally intended by them. And my reason is this, because it appears pretty clear from the context, and also from the text itself, that the Spirit is here considered as a lodger and a guest in the heart of Christians, and under that notion they are bound not to grieve him : and every Christian is concerned in that advice or precept ; and he is therefore concerned, because the Holy Spirit is to seal to him a title to his eternal inheritance. But now, if *the Spirit's sealing to the day of redemption* be only his confirmation of Christianity by the extraordinary works which were wrought in the primitive times, then either all persons are not concerned in the prohibition of *not grieving him*, (but only those in whom he vouchsafed his extraordinary presence in order to the working miracles ;) or, if all persons be concerned in it, then the argument, whereby the apostle would enforce it, is either none at all, or but a very dry one. It is therefore reasonable to believe,

3. In the third place, that these words are spoken, not with relation to the extraordinary works of the Spirit, but to his constant assistances to all Christians; and the true sense and meaning of our being *sealed by the Holy Spirit to the day of redemption* will be this: that the Holy Spirit, dwelling in our hearts, and enabling us to mortify our lusts, and to live a life of purity and holiness, is that seal that God hath set upon us to distinguish us from the rest of the world, and to make us his own children. For any man to have the Holy Spirit dwelling in him is a certain argument that he belongs to God, and that he shall be raised up among the happy at the last day. On the contrary, whosoever hath not the Holy

Spirit dwelling in him cannot plead any right to the promises of everlasting life made by our Saviour; which St. Paul does more fully make out in his eighth chapter of the Romans.

This then is the sum of the text; that we had need be very careful how we grieve or offend the Holy Spirit, because our everlasting happiness or misery depends upon his dwelling or not dwelling within us. If we so carry ourselves as not to grieve him, he will dwell within us; and that indwelling of his is our certain evidence and security that we shall be made partakers of everlasting life. If by a careless and wicked course we so provoke him that he quits his habitation, and leaves us to ourselves, then we have no seal of God upon us, we can challenge no right or property to the rewards of God's children at the last day, but are left in the crowd of the miserable, to receive our portion with apostate angels, and with hypocrites and unbelievers.

A DISCOURSE

ON

1 CORINTHIANS VII. 17.

But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all the churches.

AT the first reading of these words one would think that God's *distribution to every man*, here spoken of, was meant of the *charismata*, or those spiritual gifts which were in the times of the apostles plentifully bestowed upon all sorts of Christians, in an extraordinary and miraculous way, for the edification of the church, as indeed the phrase is sometimes used in these Epistles. But the relation which this text hath to what goes before doth necessarily determine us to understand the words, *as God hath distributed to every man*, in another way. The apostle, in this Epistle, has frequent occasion to discourse about the notion and limits of Christian liberty; and in this chapter he resolves a case or two *ex professo* which were put to him about one great point, wherein it was pretended Christian liberty was mightily concerned, and that was in the business of matrimony. The case was this, whether a Christian who was married to an unbeliever (that is, either to an infidel, Jew, or heathen) might not, by virtue of his Christian liberty, depart from the unbelieving party, and dispose of himself as he thought fit. Of this, St Paul's resolution is, that if any, who hath taken upon him Christ's religion, have an unbelieving woman to his

wife, and she is willing to dwell with him, notwithstanding his new religion, he should not put her away, ver. 12 ; and, on the contrary, if a Christian woman had an infidel for her husband, she should not depart from him so long as he was willing to cohabit with her, ver. 13. This is the effect of what he has said in the verses immediately before my text ; and for this advice he gives two reasons : one drawn from the benefits which might come to both by thus living together ; for, in all probability, it might be a means to bring over the unbeliever, whether it was husband or wife, to the true belief, and so save their souls : the other is drawn from the nature of Christianity in general, which is such, that it never made nor doth make any alteration in the civil relations or callings of mankind ; but left men, as to these things, in the same circumstances in which it found them ; and therefore it was fit and reasonable that all men should continue in that calling and that condition into which they were disposed by the divine Providence at that time when they were called to be Christians. And this is that which is represented in the words of my text, and the true account of the relation it hath to the foregoing part of the chapter : *As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every man, so let him walk* : that is, into what condition or lot soever a man is put by the providence of God, in what state or function soever he was placed when our Lord Jesus called him to be a disciple, in that let him continue, in that let him walk, even after his becoming a Christian. And this, says the apostle, *I do ordain*, as a rule to be observed, not only among you Corinthians, but *in all other churches*. And having laid down this general advice,

he dilates upon it in an instance or two more in the following words; *Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not become circumcised*, ver. 18; that is to say, Is any Jew converted to Christianity? let him not, after his conversion, use any art to make himself appear as if he had never been circumcised. And so, on the contrary, let no Gentile, when he comes over to Christ's religion, put on the badge of Judaism, which is circumcision, but let him remain as he is. And so again, in the 21st verse; *Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather*: that is, Art thou in a condition of a slave or bondman when thou receivest Christianity? do not think that the liberty which thou obtainest by thy Christianity will allow thee to go away from thy master: no, if thy master will set thee free, it is well for thee, and thou art to thank him for it: but if he will not, thou must keep as thou art; for thy religion doth not alter the civil state or condition of thy life; only there is this for thy comfort, when thou art once a Christian, though as to thy civil condition thou art a bondman, yet thou art Christ's freeman. Thou shalt enjoy all the privileges which he purchased for thee; which indeed are glorious and great; for thou shalt be set free from the power of sin, and from the consequence of it, eternal death; which is a far greater privilege than any manumission from thy earthly master can instate thee in.

This is the plain meaning of St. Paul's instances; which having laid down, he concludes this point with a repetition of the general exhortation that went be-

fore in my text : *Brethren, let every man abide in the same calling wherein he is called* ; viz. let him continue in the same civil state of life wherein he was when he first became a Christian.

Having thus given an account of the text, I observe these three points from it, which I shall make the heads of my Discourse :

I. God hath made various distributions to mankind ; or the distribution of mankind into various conditions and functions is from God.

II. The Christian religion hath made no change or alteration as to matters of civil degrees or callings ; but hath left all men, as to these things, in the same posture and station in which it found them.

III. Since the various circumstances and callings into which men are disposed are from God, no man can be justified who lives in such a way, or follows such a course of life, as cannot be supposed to be of God's distribution.

The first of these points is the supposition or foundation upon which the text proceeds.

The second is that which is directly intended in it.

The third is a necessary consequence from it.

I. God has made various distributions unto mankind ; or the distribution of mankind into various conditions and functions is from God : *As God hath distributed to every man, so let him walk* : it is God who hath distributed. As he is the parent of mankind, so he is the author of that variety of gifts and faculties, of powers and abilities, of tempers and fitnesses, which are to be seen among them ; and also of all those several ranks, degrees, and stations, of all those several callings and functions and

employments which must necessarily arise from that variety. All men are not made alike, nor framed with the same inclinations, nor qualified for the same employments, nor fitted for the same circumstances. And as various as are the talents and genius's of mankind, no less various is the outward lot and condition into which they are disposed: and, in truth, the necessities of mankind in this world do absolutely require all this variety. Without this multitude of distributions and degrees and callings, neither public societies could be maintained, nor the good of particular persons in any tolerable way attained or secured. This truth St. Paul hath most elegantly set forth in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xii. where he compares the society of Christians to a natural body. There he shews that as in the natural body there are many members, and all those members have not the same dignity and honour, nor the same use and office, and yet every member, even the meanest, hath its particular use, by which it doth real service to the body; nay, so useful it is, that the body cannot be without it; so it is in every commonwealth or body politic, whether ecclesiastical or civil; there is a necessity, both in the church and in the state, that there should be variety of functions and degrees and conditions: there must be some to govern, and some to be governed; there must be some more conspicuous, and some more obscure; some for bodily labour, others for contemplation; some whose gifts lie this way, and others whose talents lie the other way. And yet there is not one of these but in his degree and station either is or may be as useful as any who belong to the society; so that *the eye cannot say to*

the hand, I have no need of thee : nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay more, those members of the body which seem to be most feeble and dishonourable are yet very necessary, 1 Cor. xii. 21, 22.

I speak not this to discourage any man's endeavours to advance himself and his condition in any lawful way. No; as any man hath parts, or friends, or opportunities, he may do what he can to better his fortunes, and may leave one employment to follow another. But this I say, no man ought to be discontent with that present condition that by providence he is cast into. For if he be a good man it is certainly best for him, and when it ceaseth to be so, God will take care that he shall be put into another.

The inferences which I make from this point are these two following :

1. That all men, in what calling or station soever they are placed, ought to be well pleased with them, since they come from God : *God hath distributed them unto them.* It is both foolish and sinful for any man to be in the least displeased that he is not in such desirable circumstances as he fancies some others about him to be. Others live easily and fare deliciously, but he is forced to earn his living with the sweat of his brow, and that but a hard one too : this man hath the talents of knowledge and learning, but he hath no abilities of that kind : several of his neighbours have mighty advantageous, thriving employments, but his is a dull and mean one : he is forced to be a servant, and live under the command of others, whereas others can dispose of themselves and their time as they think fit : I say, how unequal

soever these kinds of dealings and dispensations seem to be, yet, coming from God, and being so necessary in the world, they ought to be very well taken by those who are in them. God had no unkindness to me in placing me in this station rather than another, but really dealt with me in that way which was both more fit for me, and wherein, if I be not wanting to my trust, I may do a great deal of service to my generation. I was not made for a statesman or a magistrate, or to be great and noble. In these ways I might perhaps have undone myself, and done hurt to the public instead of good : but in that poor mean lot I am placed, I am secure, and may do as much service to mankind in my way as the greatest of them can do in theirs. Every calling that is a lawful calling, every condition that comes to me by Providence, be it never so hard, or uneasy, or contemptible, yet is of God, and ordained for great and good ends : and a man ought no more to be dissatisfied with it, or take it unkindly that God has disposed him into it, than the foot, in the natural body, ought to be displeased that it is not made the hand ; or than the hand ought to be that it is not made the head.

2. The second inference I make from this point is, that since there are varieties of callings, and varieties of gifts and distributions in order to the fitting men for these callings, every man in the choice of an employment or way of living for himself, or those under his charge, ought to have great regard to those natural gifts and distributions which God hath bestowed upon him or them. Every one may be serviceable to God and his country, but not all in every way ; but some in one way, and some in another.

Here therefore lies our great skill and prudence, to choose fitly for ourselves; and here lies the great duty of those who have the care of youth, to place them in such circumstances as best agree with their natural temper and talents. It is a ridiculous thing to train up him to learning who hath an aversion for a book; or to put him to a trade or an active life that is made for study and retirement. The genius and disposition and capacity of every one is principally to be attended to, and the education to be suited to them, and then a calling to be chosen which suits with both, and no worldly considerations ought to divert us from this proceeding. It is not a justifiable motive to design a person to any employment merely upon this account, that it is a way to raise him in the world, and by the means of the friends and interest we can make, we have a fair prospect of getting him preferment in this course. No: if there be either an averseness of temper or an incapacity of parts, we extremely both wrong the youth under our care, and the public too, by thus yoking and fettering him. The motives of wealth and greatness and secular advantages are then only allowable when a man's natural talents and abilities give hopes that he is fitted for such callings, or such a kind of education, as may lead to those advantages. And, in truth, if this consideration were better attended to, abundance of young persons would not miscarry which now do, and the world would receive a great deal more benefit and advantage by those who are born into it.

II. But I proceed to my second general point, which I observed from this text, viz. that Christianity has made no change or alteration as to mat-

ters of civil relations or degrees or callings among men, but has left every man, as to these things, in the same posture and station in which it found him. Every man is to abide in that condition or that calling in which he was made a Christian; that is the direct sense of the text: and indeed it is a true representation of the nature of our religion, which, if it had been otherwise, would never have so effectually recommended itself to the world as we see it hath done. The design of our Lord's coming into the world, and setting on foot his religion, was only to better the morals of mankind, to make them innocent and holy and virtuous in all conditions of life, and by that means, by the virtue of his death, to reconcile them to God, and make them heirs of everlasting life in another world. But it was no part of his design to meddle with the civil constitution of mankind, which did arise from nature, and was wholly in order to this world. Christ meant not to intrench upon any man's rights, whether princes or private persons: he meant not to abolish any privilege or any due arising to any man, either from custom, or contract, or law: he meant not to alter the outward condition or circumstances of any man which the divine Providence had disposed him into: for though he was a King, yet his kingdom was not of this world, but wholly in order to another; and therefore it was all one, as to his subjects' religion, whether they were governors or governed, married or unmarried, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, bond or free, statesmen or mechanics; they were all equally acceptable to God, and Christ never intended to put them into other circumstances. So far was he himself from meddling with these

matters, that he would not so much as determine a controversy between two brethren about a piece of land, lest he should be said to take upon him the office of a judge. He, though he was, as I said, the King of the world in a spiritual sense, yet, being born a subject as to his human nature, he was as obedient to the laws and customs and constitutions of the state where he lived as the meanest subject: and as he behaved himself, so did he command all of his religion to behave in imitation of him. So likewise did his apostles exhort to *give to all men their due; to submit to every constitution of man for the Lord's sake; to obey those who had the rule over them; and to continue in that condition or that calling wherein they were called to be Christians.*

Now if this be a true representation of Christianity, as without doubt it is, then we may justly make three inferences from hence:

1. First, how much they are to be blamed who forsake their callings and ordinary way of living upon a pretence of a purer religion; who will needs be so holy, and so much above the pitch of other Christians, that they will have nothing to do with the world, or the things that concern it. Of this sort are some of our enthusiasts, who wholly neglect the business of their callings under a pretence of religion, and run up and down from house to house, from meeting to meeting, for the gratifying their fancies, and propagating those religious notions which have possessed their heads. But as for their domestic concerns, their families, their children, or servants, or the employments by which they should get their livelihood, these are quite neglected and laid aside. And

of this sort likewise are those persons among the Romanists, who, upon pretence of devotion, refuse a calling whereby they may be in a capacity of doing service to their country, or leave their calling after they have entered into it, and retire into monasteries, to live at their own ease, and to be free from the cares and troubles of this world. Both these sorts of persons are to be blamed. They do not consider the nature of the Christian religion, which is to make men holy in their persons and in their lives, but not in the least to take them off from their worldly callings, or from using those talents which God hath given them for the benefit of the country where they live. They do not consider the obligation they have to the public society whereof they are members, which is injured by these kinds of practices; for hereby they are not only rendered useless to the commonwealth, wherein, if they followed an honest calling, they might be very serviceable; but they do oftentimes a great deal of mischief to it, by unsettling and subverting other men, and filling their heads with abundance of foolish notions and scruples in religion which are dangerous to government, and the public peace and happiness: and as for their better serving God by thus leaving their callings, it is a mere pretence; for he serves God best who doth most good in the world: but that is not to be done by throwing up our callings, but by honestly and industriously and laboriously prosecuting them. He serves God the best who doth it most universally and effectually. Not he who spends the most time in praying, or reading, or hearing, though all these be necessary duties, and without which it is impossible for a Christian to live as he

should do; but he, who together with the performance of these duties takes care to express a diligent and laborious charity to the public: to set an example of innocence and virtue, and a religious conversation in a life of business and action: to be useful to his family, to his friends, to his neighbourhood, to the whole kingdom; in educating children, doing offices of kindness and charity as he hath opportunity; serving his generation in the diligent management of those parts and those talents that God hath given him in some lawful, useful employment to the public advantage. This is that course of life which most expresses religion, and most tends to the glory of God, it being a practice of our Saviour's great precept that we should *let our light shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven*, Matt. v. 16.

2. If Christianity has made no alteration as to the natural and civil relations and obligations that men have to one another, but hath left these as it found them; then they are much mistaken who plead it as a part of their Christianity to be exempt from obedience and subjection to the powers and magistrates of this world; that upon this very account, that they have the honour to be the servants of Christ, think themselves perfectly discharged from any other master or governor. This, though it be as wild a principle and as opposite to Christianity as can enter into the mind of man, yet there have been, and it is to be feared there still are, who call themselves Christians, among whom it hath found entertainment. And here there are two sorts to be taken notice of, and to be reprov'd. [1.] Those who account it an infringement and violation of the

privileges which Christ hath conferred upon them, to be in subjection to any one at all. Of this kind were some of the anabaptists in Germany, and our fifth-monarchy men. They will have no king but Jesus: all secular government is an usurpation upon the Lord's people: let Christ be set upon his throne, and down with all unchristian magistrates, whether ecclesiastical or civil. All the Lord's people have equal privileges, and therefore away with all degrees of superiority and inferiority: *Christ hath bought them with a price, and therefore they must not be the servants of men, but ought to stand fast in the liberty in which Christ hath set them free, and not again be entangled in the yoke of bondage.*

[2.] Others there are who do not carry this levelling principle so high, but yet hold so much of it as will necessarily render government a precarious thing, and not fail to embroil the world in confusion. They are not against magistrates, but against all wicked, ungodly magistrates: they are not against some men's having greater honour and greater estates than others; but they are against the honour and riches of the profane. Their principle is, that the right which any man hath to a crown, or to an office, or to an estate, is altogether founded in his being godly and gracious, and of the right religion. But if he be a wicked man, or an opposer of Christ's true religion, he forfeits all his right and title to whatever he had; and not only may, but ought to be dispossessed of it, though it be never so effectually secured to him by the laws of the land. But both these are wicked, unchristian principles, as well as destructive to human society. Whatever the notion of Christian liberty be, I am sure it meddles

not with civil government nor civil rights; nor will it bear out any man in resisting or opposing the secular magistrates, be they good or be they bad; be they of a right religion or of a wrong; be they Christians or be they heathens. Nor will it give any man a title to my estate or my office, or allow him by force or fraud to detain from me what is my due by law, or dispossess me of what I am possessed of, though, as to my person, I should be the vilest wretch upon earth. Nothing makes void a civil right but a civil law; and my Christianity is so far from setting me above laws, that it strictly enjoins my obedience to them. If Christianity is so tender of men's civil rights, as that it will not permit a very slave to depart out of his master's family without his master's leave, though his condition there may be well supposed very hard and uneasy, (as we see it is in this chapter, ver. 21.) little can we imagine that any man is warranted by or upon account of the gospel (nay, though it was for the gospel's sake) to disquiet or disturb the peace of the nation, to raise rebellion, or to abet it; or, in a word, to withhold or withdraw, either from the public or from any private person, any right or due which nature or law hath vested in them.

3. If Christianity hath made no alteration as to the civil degrees and callings of men, but hath obliged all *to abide in that degree, and to walk in that calling* they are cast into by the providence of God; then they are much to be blamed, who, upon pretence of any gifts or powers they are furnished with, think it lawful to forsake their station, and usurp places or offices which they are not lawfully called to. I do not here speak of a man's changing

one calling or one way of living for another ; as for instance, when a man cannot do so well in one employment, to go to another, which is either fitter for his temper, or wherein he hath a fairer prospect of living more comfortably in the world ; this is unquestionably lawful, and every man may, in such case, do as he thinks fit : but I here speak of entering upon places or offices which, either by the laws of the land or the laws of God, men are not warranted to execute. This, I say, is not to be done in any case.

And here I have likewise respect to two wild fanatical principles, which men are apt enough to take up, which yet, wherever they are entertained, fail not to fill the state with seditions, and the church with schisms in abundance. They are these ; that where there are abuses and corruptions in a church or state, there every man hath authority to reform them, though he be not commissioned thereto by law, but indeed acts in contradiction to it. The other is, that whosoever finds himself gifted and qualified for the work of the ministry, and thinks he may do the church good service in that way, may, without any further call, enter upon that office.

But both these are directly contrary to the apostle's precept in the text, *Let every man abide in that calling wherein he is called ; and so I ordain in all churches.* Art thou a private person ? thou must not take the sword into thy hand to punish malefactors, nor invade a jurisdiction that doth not belong to thee of reforming public abuses ; nay, though thou seest that the magistrate to whom it belongs is negligent herein, and does not perform

the trust committed to him. If things, either in church or state, go not so well as they should, thou mayest, nay thou oughtest to do all that in thy sphere thou art capable of doing for the amending them. Thou must use thy hearty prayers to God; nay, thou mayest, if thou please, modestly represent thy sense of things to those who are in a more public station, and are more immediately concerned about these things; and, in a word, thou mayest use all honest endeavours that the law of the land allows thee. But still thou art not to transgress thy bounds; thou art not to forget in what capacity thou actest: a private man is not a magistrate, and therefore must not invade his office; an inferior magistrate is not the supreme, and therefore must not exceed the limits of his commission. And as for the secret whispers and impulses of God's Spirit, which are often pretended for such illegal usurpations, they are not to be regarded; *God is the God of order, and not of confusion*, as the apostle has told us, 1 Cor. xiv. 33; and therefore all these suggestions and impulses which tend to confusion, which, if they be followed, naturally create disturbance to the public peace, cannot be from God, but are the effects of an overheated brain, or illusions of the Devil. Besides, the age which we now live in is not an age of inspirations and impulses; we have a standing and fixed rule to proceed by in all our actions, and that is, the written word of God, and the law of the land: and whatever actions are not warranted or allowed by them, no immediate inspiration or impulse can justify. And the same thing is to be said as to the ministerial function. A man may have exceeding good parts, and a great

talent in speaking : he may have likewise attained a considerable skill in the scriptures and other sorts of learning, and have all the other qualifications which are needful to make him a very useful minister of the church : but still this alone, without a lawful call, doth not empower him to take that office upon him ; nay, he quits his station, and can neither answer it to God nor the church, if he does. But is not the very having these abilities, and the desire of making use of them, a lawful call, without any more ? No ; he must have the call of men too, even the call of those whom Jesus Christ hath intrusted with the government of the church. If a man do not come in this way, he is not a lawful shepherd, but an intruder into Christ's flock, whatever natural or acquired abilities he may have to fit him for the employment.

III. But to leave this point, I proceed to the third general head which I proposed to speak to ; which is not indeed directly affirmed or contained in my text, but is rather a necessary consequence from it ; viz. that since the various circumstances and callings into which men are disposed are from God, therefore no man can be justified who lives in such a way, or follows such a course of life, as cannot be supposed to be of God's distribution. This, I say, is a natural consequence of my text ; and it thus ariseth : the text implies that every man hath talents and gifts distributed to him by God, in order to the fitting him for some civil employment or course of life. It implies likewise, that, according to the variety of these talents and distributions, men are actually disposed into several callings and degrees and conditions by the providence of God, and in these

they are to walk, or in these they are to exercise themselves; all this is affirmed or implied in my text. Now that which I gather from hence is, that if any man do not walk or do not exercise himself in such a course of life, or such a civil employment, as answers the ends of God's distributions to him, and suits with the station and degree he is disposed into by God's providence; but either follows no calling at all, or, which is worse, gets his living by an unlawful one; such a person, I say, doth not walk as God hath distributed to him, and therefore his course of life is not to be justified. Every man therefore must have a calling, and every man's calling must be of God's distribution; viz. it must be warranted by the laws of God, and suit with the ends for which God hath made his distributions, and appointed callings in the world.

To speak more particularly: to the making up of a calling, such as God hath appointed, there seem to go these three things:

1. That the course of life, or the employment that a man pitches upon, be such as will be sufficient to exercise his diligence and industry. If it be not such as will keep him out of idleness, it deserves not the name of a calling: there is nothing so contrary to the nature of man, as to let his powers and faculties rust for want of employment. Our souls, next to the divine and angelical natures, are the most active beings in the world. It is true they are not all equally active in the same way, but every one according to the proper powers which God hath bestowed upon it in the natural composition of the man; and therefore, though men have not only the liberty, but also a necessity upon them, to employ

themselves several ways, yet every one is so to employ himself as to keep his faculties in constant exercise, and to be able to give a good account of his time. And, in truth, if all other things be equal, those are the best callings that a man can follow, in which he hath the largest sphere of activity for the employing his industry and improving his natural gifts and talents; and in which he hath the best opportunities of filling up all the vacant interstices of his time to good purposes.

2. Another requisite of a calling is, that it be such a course of life as doth employ a man's time innocently and lawfully; for otherwise, be it never so full of business, it is none of those callings which God hath distributed mankind into, and therefore is by no means to be followed. Well, but what callings are innocent, and what are not? I mean not to enter into a discourse of particular callings, or to arraign or pass sentence on any one trade or art which is used among us: but I only lay down this general rule for the judging of this point, which may be applied to any particulars, as we have occasion. Any calling that doth, in the nature and design of it, either act sin or encourage it; any calling that doth directly minister to vice and wickedness of what kind soever; *that* is not an innocent calling; and a man had better be reduced to the extremest degree of poverty, than get his living by such a one. But here I desire it may be taken notice of, that when I speak of ministering to vice and sin, I put in these words *directly*, and *in its own nature*; for there may be several callings and professions which do *indirectly* and *by accident* minister to the vices and sins of men, which yet, for all that, are not unlawful

callings. For instance; every body knows that taverns and victualling-houses, and such like places of entertainment, are often used to the purposes of intemperance and luxury. But then, I say, this excess is not a natural consequence of keeping such houses, or the thing designed by them; but it is a subverting the ends for which the law allows them; (which ends are the conveniences of men, and not their debauches;) and therefore these are lawful callings notwithstanding their abuses. Only it extremely concerns all those who follow such employments, to be as careful as possibly they can, not to suffer, much less to contribute, to such kind of irregularities. And as it is in this kind of life, so it is in many others; nay, I may say in most by which men get their livings.

3. Another requisite of an honest calling is this, that it be of some advantage to the public, and not merely for the getting a livelihood. If any man was so foolish as to give another constant wages for picking straws, or catching flies, or doing some other such ridiculous and unnecessary work; I do not think it justifiable in that man who should employ himself this way, though it was for the getting his bread. Here may indeed be no want of work; the man may take pains enough, such as they be, in this foolish way; and I cannot see that such an employment doth directly minister to vice: but yet here wants something to make it a lawful calling, and that is, usefulness to the public. A man cannot answer it to God, nor to the world, for thus employing his time or labour, because he doth no good; he serves no end, either of necessity or convenience to mankind, and consequently lives to no purpose. These are indeed ludicrous instances which I have

given : but for any thing I know, there are some employments, about which several busy themselves, which serve to as little purpose as those which I have now mentioned. But here again; when we say that every calling ought to bring in some advantage to the public, to make it an allowable one, my meaning is not to exclude all callings from being lawful ones, which are not of absolute necessity to the life of man. No; I would put no scruple into any man's head who follows a trade or an employment which is not so very necessary, but that the world might do well enough without it. For I account even those to be lawful arts or ways of living, which minister any way to the convenience, nay even to the ornaments, the delights, the recreations of mankind; always supposing that these conveniences, or ornaments, or recreations, which they serve, to be innocent in themselves, and noways repugnant to the rules of the gospel. But if they be forbidden recreations or forbidden ornaments, then that calling which serves to them cannot be a lawful calling. But then, having granted the allowableness of these callings, because they do in some degree bring benefit to the world; (for even to minister to the honest delights or ornaments of human life is a benefit;) it is fit that I should add this further, that those callings are always more eligible (and to be preferred) which serve the necessary ends of human life, than those which minister only to its conveniences; and those which are highly convenient in a commonwealth before those which only make provision for recreations or ornament; for these last are the lowest degrees of callings, how gainful soever otherwise they may be.

Having thus given an account of the nature of callings, and the obligation which all men are under to live in the exercise of them, I cannot but make some application of what has been said to some particular sorts of people among us.

(1.) It were heartily to be wished that the nobility and gentry, and all men of estates, would seriously take an account of themselves, how they stand as to this matter. They, as well as others, are to follow some employment in which they may exercise their natural parts, and do service to the world. If they do not, they are, for any thing I know, as great criminals as those vagrants and idle people which the law orders should be sent to the house of correction, to be made to work for their living. It is the most ridiculous thing in the world to fancy that because a man is honourably born, or hath an estate, that therefore he is noways concerned in the world, but just to live after his own mind; and that only the poorer sort of people are made for labour and care. Why, the greatest of men are but the stewards of God's blessings, and are as accountable to him for them as the poorest; and the more talents they have, the more diligent ought they to be in employing these talents to their Lord's advantage. Well; but what is the calling or employment which persons of this quality we are speaking of are to follow? To which I answer, that whatever their calling be, I am sure it is not merely to contrive for their pleasures and diversions, and to fill up their whole time in passing from one delight and recreation to another. They have more to do within doors than to eat and drink neatly and modishly, to sleep and dress, to receive visits and read romances. And they have more to

do without doors than to go about telling of news, paying of compliments, visiting the theatres, and meeting at clubs. And yet, as the world now goes, for a gentleman to spend his whole time in these kind of things is counted a very innocent way of living; and they want not the reputation of sober and virtuous persons who employ themselves no worse. And I must confess that this may be called indeed virtue, in comparison of that wicked course of life which others are engaged in, who spend their days and their nights in revelling and drunkenness, in swearing and burlesquing religion, in pursuing unlawful amours, and all kind of debauchery.—O who would take pains to get an estate to have it thus spent! what sober man would not desire a thousand times rather to see his son an honest, industrious ploughman or mechanic, than to see him the sprucest, the wittiest, the wealthiest gentleman of the age, and to live at this rate? O what will these men say for themselves, when the impartial Judge of the world comes to enter into a strict account with them, not only for their time which they have had in common with others, but for these extraordinary advantages of birth, wit, education, and fortune which they had above other men! Nay, how will they answer for this course of life to their country, which might expect great matters from them? for they should be the prime stay and support of the kingdom where they live; the great examples and encouragers and patrons of all virtue and industry and ingenuity; whereas, as they have ordered the matter, they do little or no good at all to the public, unless perhaps by accident, to those who raise benefit to themselves out of their folly: nay, so far are they from doing good to the public,

that by their dissolute conversation they do a great deal of harm. And the only end which those advantages, which they have above others, serve to, is to put them into a capacity of doing more mischief, of being greater burdens and diseases to the nation than they could have been without those advantages. But what is all this said for? to reproach the gentry and those who have estates? God forbid that it should the least enter into my heart, but to awaken and rouse those who live idly and unprofitably, and to set them upon serious thoughts and serviceable employments; that they may live like themselves, be the honour and the ornament, as well as the defence and security of the nation; that they may put themselves into a capacity of serving their king and their country, as well in peace as in war; that they be useful to all who are under them, and all who are about them, in other ways than by spending their money among them; that they be hearty lovers of God and of his true religion, and patterns of loyalty, sobriety, and godliness to all those to whom the influence of their example doth extend.

(2.) But there is another particular to which I desire to make application of the general doctrine of callings which I have been insisting on. And I do it the rather, because I am afraid the age we live in doth too much need it; it is the business of gaming. I should be loath to say that all gaming is, simply and in itself, unlawful, or that even a serious Christian may not sometimes, and at some seasons, use the common games for the relaxation of his mind, and obliging and diverting his company; no, certainly, so long as play is used only as a recreation, it is allowable; and the reason is, because there is

no law of God or man that doth forbid it. And if it be not forbid by a law, the use of it cannot be unlawful. But then every sober man is to take care that this liberty be used with great prudence and caution; viz. that he do not let it exceed the bounds of an innocent recreation: for instance, that he do not set his affections too much upon it, or play with such concern as to be put into a passion at his bad success; that he sits not too long at it, nor comes to it too frequently; that he always prefers his necessary business before his divertisements; that he so order his recreations of this kind, as that they render him the more fit to spend his other time the more usefully; and, lastly, that he play not for money, but diversion; at least for no more money than what he can very well lose without the least discomposure of mind, and without the least prejudice to his family or estate. And it must be less too than he is willing to give upon a good occasion, and less than he doth oftentimes bestow upon objects of charity; and, lastly, when he does play for such little sums, it must be rather for the increasing his diversion, or the better entertainment of his friends, than for the sake of augmenting his stock. Thus far, I say, and with these restrictions, to use play is innocent enough. But here is the misery; there is a sort of men who even make a trade of gaming; it is their constant employment, whensoever they can find out company to their purpose; and they venture great sums at it, even such as may endanger their whole fortune, if they should prove losers. It is not their diversion, but their serious business; and they pursue it as industriously as other men do their necessary callings. And to some, indeed, this is their

only livelihood; for they have no other way of getting bread for themselves and their families. But this whole thing, as thus practised, is stark nought, and abominable both in those who have estates, and in those who have none. And whosoever makes this his way of living has a sad account to make to God Almighty.

It is one requisite of a lawful calling (as has been already shewn) that it be sufficient to employ a man's time and his talents in a way suitable to the ends for which they were given him. But can there be a worse consumption of our time, or a greater abuse of our talents, than to put both of them to no greater use than throwing a die or turning a pack of cards? To make any calling lawful, it is required that it should not minister in its own nature to sin and impiety. But what doth more naturally minister to these purposes than this way of gaming we are speaking of? or what doth more effectually tend to engage a man in all sorts of crimes and immoralities? Of this we need no greater evidence than the undecent and impetuous passions of all sorts, the execrable oaths and imprecations, the lies and cheats and cozenages, and brutish quarrels and contests, that do inseparably attend the trade of gaming.

But further, what benefit or what advantage doth from hence redound to mankind? (for that is another thing we ought to be satisfied in, before we pronounce any course of life to be lawful.) Why, if the gamesters will be concluded by this, they are certainly cast; for there is nothing of good, I mean of public good, can possibly come from this trade of theirs; but, on the contrary, abundance of evil of all kinds; and that not by accident, or through the

miscarriage of a particular person, here or there, but by direct and necessary consequence of the thing itself. How many men are undone for ever in their morals by being once dipped and initiated in this infernal mystery! and, as if damning their souls were not enough, how many thousand estates have been broken and ruined! how many families, wives, and children hath it reduced to the extremest degree of poverty and contempt! Nay, what more expeditious method hath ever been found out to bring a man to an untimely end; whether by poison, or a quarrel, or the gallows! In a word, the thing is so desperate a venture, that, whosoever is once deeply engaged in it, there is little hopes of his ever coming off without a grievous wound, either in his conscience or in his estate, if it be his good luck to escape utter destruction.

And after all, pray what is the advantage men propose to themselves in running such risks as these? What is it which makes them venture so desperately? Is it that it is great and genteel to game high? Why, among all men who either have wisdom or sobriety, or who love their estates, this is exploded as the most unaccountable madness in the world. Is it the pleasure of gaming which tempts them? Why that is every whit as much gratified by playing for nothing, or for trifling sums, as if they staked their estates, their wives, and children. Well then, it must only be the covetousness of money that makes them venture so deep. This, I believe, is true, generally speaking. But then it were well if they would consider how wretchedly they defeat that desire of money, if it should be their fortune to lose what they play for, and how miserable they

must needs be thereupon. But perhaps they think not of this; their thoughts are wholly taken up with the hopes of winning. Why, let it be so; and suppose they have that luck and success they wish and hope for, are they ever a whit the richer for this? Is their stock in the least increased by what they win at play? A great many wise men will say, No; for they say that all gain which accrues by play is unlawful gain, and ought either to be refunded to the party it is gained from, or to be given in charity, or to public uses; but by no means to be put into a man's stock, lest the unlawful mixture should corrupt the mass of what is lawfully gotten, and make it unprosperous to the possessor, as it is often seen in the course of the world. And this is not said altogether without reason; for indeed it will be hard for the wittiest of the gamesters to make out a lawful title to any considerable sum which he wins by play, though he win it never so fairly. As for little petty sums which men stake for their diversion, and the one is as willing to lose as the other to win, and where no damage accrues to the party by the loss, these have a quite different consideration. But as for great sums, wherein a man is or ought to be concerned, it is not so clear that they are lawful gain, or that a man can with a good conscience take them or keep them, let them be never so fairly won. For in all dealings between man and man, that gain is only accounted lawful for which there is a valuable consideration. A tradesman ought not to take his customer's money, unless he afford him commodities to the worth of it; nor ought any man to make a gain of another, unless he either do something, or give something, that bears some proportion, or makes

some compensation for the gain he makes of him. This is the standing rule of justice and equity in all dealings between man and man. In every lawful gain there is a valuable consideration. But now, in the gain which accrues to a man by play, there is no such consideration; nay, so far from that, that a man cannot be a gainer in that way, but the other whom he deals with, or who is concerned with him, must of necessity be as much a loser. Now surely that cannot be a just or allowable way of getting, which is perpetually and directly to the hurt and loss of another man. Nor is this the sense only of two or three nice and severe casuists, but of the wisest and best men of all ages and all religions. It was the old Roman law, that all the money which gamesters won should be taken from them, and employed upon public works, as being unlawfully gotten by them. Aristotle accounts, that the profit which a man gets by the dice, and the purchases that a thief makes upon the highway, are to be ranked equally among the unlawful gains: and St. Augustine tells us, *Bona alea amissa, tanquam furto ablata, veteres restituenda putabant*; viz. The ancients were of opinion, that money won by dice, or at tables, &c. ought to be restored, like money that was stolen.

I am sensible it will be a hard matter to persuade all men of the truth of this. But, however, I cannot but lay before them what the sense of wise and good men has been concerning this affair; and whether all will believe this or no, I hope all sober persons, who are either concerned for their happiness in this world, or salvation in the next, and who have any regard either for their estates or families or reputa-

tions, will keep out of this ungodly course of gaming, and will seriously apply themselves to such ways of living wherein they may be serviceable to their families, to their country, and to the church of God ; adorning their profession by a holy and unblameable life, that so their souls may be saved in the world to come.

A DISCOURSE

ON

EPHESIANS V. 15, 16.

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

THIS *circumspect walking* which is here recommended, and *redeeming the time* which is laid down as an instance of it, may be interpreted two ways.

1st. It may either imply great diligence and watchfulness in prosecuting the work of our Christianity in general, and in order thereto that we improve our time to the best advantage, spending as little of it idly as is possible ; or,

2dly. It may imply prudence and caution and discretion in the management of ourselves and our affairs with reference to this world, especially in times of difficulty and danger ; that by this means we may gain time to ourselves, and avoid the mischiefs that the evil days threaten us with.

Each of these interpretations, as it hath good authority on its side, so doth it likewise afford us useful instructions ; and therefore I shall reject neither of them, but in treating upon this text shall take them both in, beginning with the interpretation first mentioned.

St. Paul, in the former part of this chapter, is evidently exhorting the Ephesians, that, laying aside all wickedness and sensuality, they would live a holy and a pure life ; and he doth it from this con-

sideration, that *they had been sometime darkness, but now were light in the Lord*: therefore they ought to *walk as children of light*, ver. 8. They were heretofore in a heathen state, but now the light of the gospel did shine forth to them; and therefore it was an infinite reproach to them, if they did any longer pursue the unfruitful works of darkness: *Wherefore*, as the apostle goes on in the words before my text, *the Spirit of God saith, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*, ver. 14. And then comes my text, *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is*, ver. 15, 16, 17. As much as to say, It is the will of the Lord that ye should awake from the sleep of sin; that ye should arise from death to life; that ye should mortify your evil habits and corrupt affections, which have so long enthralled you; and live from henceforward a holy and a spiritual life. This is it to which ye are called and obliged by the gospel. It therefore infinitely concerns you to look about you, to be very watchful of your own actions, to be circumspect in all your behaviour, to redeem the time past, which you have spent in vanity, by improving the time present to the best purposes, nay, to catch at all opportunities of advancing in virtue and goodness. (This is the meaning of redeeming or purchasing the time that is here mentioned.) And so much the rather, because it is an evil and dangerous world ye live in. Ye have a great many enemies to conflict with; ye have a torrent of bad examples and customs to struggle with;

ye are surrounded with temptations of all sorts; so that unless ye be wonderfully careful of your own conduct, and watchful over your enemies, you are in great danger to be run down, and lose all the fruits and rewards of your taking upon yourselves the profession of Christianity.

This is the account which some of the interpreters give of this passage. Now taking St. Paul's precept of *walking circumspectly* in this sense, it contains in it these following duties, or will oblige us to these following particulars.

1. First of all, we must look narrowly to our hearts, that is to say, to our purposes and intentions. Whoever means to *walk circumspectly* must above all things take care of his designs, that they be well fixed and settled. If a man live at random, having no principles to act by, no steady aims or purposes to pursue, he is unprovided of all defence, and exposed to the assaults of every temptation that comes in his way. I cannot say that his guard is easily broken, for he has no guard at all, but is like a ship without a rudder, carried away with every wind; like a house without lock or bars, a ready prey to the first enemy that shall attack him. If therefore we mean to live to any purposes of religion, it is absolutely necessary that we should in the first place look carefully to our hearts, so as to keep them always in a good frame and disposition. My meaning is, that we so fix our aims and designs, as that it shall be the constant, unchangeable principle of our minds, and the great business we propose to ourselves throughout the whole course of our lives, to endeavour to approve ourselves to God in our whole conversation. Whatever other projects we

may have in our heads, yet to make it our first and chief care to please God in every action we do, and for no consideration in the world to violate our duty, or make our conscience uneasy. This that I now say is not only an instance of circumspect walking, but the very foundation of it. If we would *walk not as fools, but as wise*, we must lay the first step here; for it is *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*, as Solomon tells us, Prov. ix. 10. And without doubt this is that which he adviseth in another place, where he saith, *My son, keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of that are the issues of life*, chap. iv. 23. Thine *heart*; what is that but thy designs, thy purposes, thy intentions, which are the springs and principles from which thy actions flow? If these be well fixed; if these be guarded and preserved pure and sincere, they will produce such a conversation as will end in eternal life; but otherwise, the issues of them will be death.

2. But, secondly, another instance of circumspection is to examine carefully every action before we engage in it. The circumspect man will not venture upon things hand over head, but first considers and weighs the matter that is before him. And always his first inquiry is, whether the thing be lawful, whether it be consistent with his duty; and, if it be not, he will by no means engage in it: nay, though it be lawful, if it be not also expedient, (which is the next thing he considers,) that very consideration is enough to make him forbear the action. It is not the company he is engaged in, nor the solicitation of his friends, nor his present inclination or humour, nor the heat of a passion, nor the serving of any in-

terest ; I say, none of these things will sway him ; but he will examine both his own conscience, and the fitness or unfitness of the action ; nay, he will take a view, as far as he can, of all the consequences that will follow upon it, and what influence it will have upon his own spiritual good, or the good of others, before he will venture upon it. Easy and weak and careless persons are drawn to do any thing that is presented to them under fair colours ; but those who are circumspect will examine all the colours, by putting them into several lights. The very notion of circumspection is to look round, and to view and consider every thing in all its several shapes and respects and tendencies. And if we would make it our practice thus to look before us, thus to scan and examine our actions before we engaged in them, how happy, how good, how virtuous might we be ! how many sins should we avoid, that we are now daily surprised into ! how many temptations might we overcome, that now daily lead us captive ! But, alas ! here is our misery, we rush into actions upon a present heat and *impetus* without much thinking or considering ; and hence it comes to pass that we are betrayed into a thousand follies and sins, which afterwards we have too just cause to repent of. If we did but use to look before us, we should rarely miscarry : *Ponder the paths of thy feet*, says Solomon, *and then all thy ways shall be ordered aright*, Prov. iv. 26.

3. Another instance which this precept of circumspect walking will oblige us to, is, to be careful to put a stop to the first beginnings of evils that we feel in ourselves. All our sins do arise from some passion or appetite that is within us, which com-

monly is excited and takes fire at some external object, and from hence grows unreasonable and extravagant; and there begins the sin. Now it is pretty much in our power, if we have used our minds to think, and are not strangers to our own humours and constitutions; I say, it is very much in our power to stop the beginnings or the first motions of any irregular passions or appetites; I mean so far, as that it shall not proceed to a criminal action; nay, not so far as to obtain a full consent of the will. For before it comes to that, reason may interpose; and if we cannot vanquish the desire or the passion by arguments, yet we may stifle it easily, by diverting our thoughts to other objects. But if we once give way to it, and do not presently suppress it, it is a hundred to one it grows too strong for us, and doth produce its effects in our outward actions, though much to our sorrow and repentance afterwards. It is here just as in any combustible matter which is set on fire: if we take the flame presently, it is soon extinguished; but give it a little scope, and it proves often beyond your power to quench it, till it hath done mischief. Here therefore will lie a great part of the Christian circumspection that is required of us, viz. to attend carefully to the first motions and inclinations that are excited in our hearts by any object or occasion that happens to be presented to us; and if we find them irregular, and tending to sin, by all means to put an immediate stop to them. If we take this method, it is impossible we should fall into any grievous or presumptuous sin: and though we may be guilty of many faults and infirmities, yet we shall not be capable of doing any thing that shall much wound

our conscience, or forfeit our title to God's favour.

4. Another instance, wherein this vigilance and circumspection that is here recommended by the apostle is to be exercised, is this ; we should never in this world apprehend ourselves free from danger, but live in constant expectation of being assaulted by our spiritual enemies ; and upon that consideration we should always be upon our guard. We are never so secure, but that we may be in danger the next moment. How often are we drawn away to that which is evil, even then when we did not in the least dream of any such matter ! Temptations are always ready at hand, so long as we carry these mortal bodies about us. There is nothing so innocent but it may, and often doth, prove a snare to us. Our business, our company, our dearest relations, nay, our very meat and drink, as necessary as these things are, yet do they oftentimes prove great temptations to sin. And if we are thus tempted when we are most at our own command, what temptations must we expect in our other conversations and entanglements with a busy, designing, and yet a malicious and a wicked world. Yet such is the lot and portion of all of us, that whether we will or no, we shall be engaged in some troublesome and dangerous adventures. It concerns us all therefore, as much as the frailty of human nature will allow us, always to keep a strict guard over ourselves, to look to our senses, to look to our tongues, to look to our appetites, and to watch over all our actions : *We must* (as the apostle exhorts, Eph. vi. 14.) *stand with our loins girt about, having on the whole armour of God.* Our Saviour tells us, Matt. xxiv. 43.

That if the goodman of the house had known at what hour the thief would have come, he would have watched, and not suffered his house to be broken through. The application he makes of that parable concerns us as much as those to whom he spoke it; viz. *What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch,* Mark xiii. 37.

Thus I have given an account of all the particulars of that circumspection that is required of us in the text, in the sense in which I am now treating of it: so far, I mean, as I could collect them from the general words. But there is one particular of this circumspect walking yet behind, which I think I ought not only to take notice of, but insist a little more upon than I have done upon the rest, both because the apostle hath in the text particularly mentioned it, and likewise because it is of such importance, that if it be not taken care of, all that has been said about circumspect walking will signify nothing.

The thing that I mean is, *redeeming our time: see that ye walk circumspectly, &c. redeeming the time.* Whether you will take this as an instance of our *walking circumspectly*, or as a means to secure our so walking, is to me an indifferent matter. But I am sure it is not indifferent, but absolutely necessary, that men should be seriously called upon to put it in practice. This therefore shall make the second part of my Discourse.

Redeeming the time in the sense that we are now speaking of it, (for as to the other sense of the phrase, as it imports the gaining of time, it doth not yet come under consideration,) I say, *redeeming of time* may be understood two ways, either with re-

spect to the time past the time present. To redeem time past is to make amends for our former carelessness and negligence in any work we were engaged in, by using double diligence in that work afterwards. Thus a traveller may be said to redeem his time, who, having loitered a whole day in an inn without making any progress in his journey, doth the next day go a double stage, performing the journey both of that day and of the day before.

Now in this sense of the phrase *redeeming the time* is a duty that doth highly concern us; all those of us I mean, who have lived loosely or viciously the former part of their lives. If ever such persons come to be serious, and to take wise counsels, they must endeavour to recover all that time they have misspent by a more than ordinary diligence for the time to come. The further they are gone in any evil course, the more severely must they exact of themselves the practice of the contrary virtues. They must not sit down content with the ordinary degrees of virtue and goodness, which would be indeed commendable in a young beginner; but they must labour to be so good, and so abundant in the work of the Lord, as, if they had not gone astray, they might have been presumed at this time to have been according to the ordinary rates of men's progress in virtue. This is to redeem the time past.

But though this be a very useful sense, and indeed that which our English phrase of *redeeming the time* doth most properly import; yet, as I take it, this was not the sense St. Paul must be supposed principally to have designed, when he used this expression; and therefore I shall pursue this notion of it no further.

Redeeming the time in the apostle's sense must have respect chiefly to the time present. The words which he uses are ἐξαγοραζόμενοι καιρὸν, which, if we would render strictly and properly, are as much as if we should say, *buying or purchasing the time or the season*. So that his meaning is, we are to value time extremely, and to purchase it at any rate, though it be with the loss of our pleasures, or conveniencies, or any other thing that the fleshly principle within us is most delighted with. We Christians must act in our spiritual concerns as merchants and tradesmen do in their temporal, who let slip no time, no season, no opportunity of improving their estates, and making a good bargain for themselves; but prefer the gain of their trade above all the little designs of ease or good company, or the like. Now taking this to be the meaning of *redeeming of time*, there are three things which the duty will oblige us to.

1. To take care that we employ our time, and that we employ it innocently. And this indeed is the lowest degree of *redeeming our time*.

2. A step higher than this, to increase and improve our time, by cutting off, as much as in us lies, all unnecessary consumptions of it.

3. And which is yet a further degree of *redeeming time*, to improve all that time which we have gained to ourselves by the retrenching our superfluous expenses of it, to the best and noblest purposes we can put it to.

I shall consider these particulars a little more distinctly and carefully.

1. The first and lowest instance of care that this duty of *redeeming our time* will put us upon, is,

that we employ our time, and that we employ it innocently. We are at no hand to pass away our time in idleness, but constantly to find some work for ourselves. For any man at any time to be able to say of himself, I have nothing to do; if he means thereby that he knows not how to employ his next hour, is a certain argument that the man is either a very silly or a very dissolute person. If it comes to that pass with us that our time lies upon our hands, and we know not what to do with it, but are longing and wishing that this or the other good hour would come, when we shall meet with something whereby we hope to gratify ourselves, things are in a marvellous bad posture with us. We ought to flee idleness, as we would the worst disease, not only because it renders a man's life burdensome and uneasy, nay, I may say, a very torment to himself, but because it is very mischievous and very criminal. It is that which makes a man perfectly useless in the world, and he lives to no other purpose than, cormorant like, to devour the fruits of the earth. It is the infallible way to spoil all that briskness of temper, that vigour of constitution, and quickness of parts, that God hath given him, and to make him sottish and stupid. It is the inlet to temptations of all sorts, and the occasion of most of those misadventures that befall us in this life. The Devil never wants baits for such kind of people, and however they be applied, it is odds but they succeed, and the man is caught. And besides all this, idleness is a great sin in itself; it is one of those three sins that brought fire and brimstone upon Sodom, as the prophet tells us, and therefore surely it is not an ordinary malignity that is in it. Our time is one of the most

precious talents that God has intrusted us with, and in this respect more precious than any of the rest, that it is only ours for the present, and gone the next moment; so that whatever portions of it we lose in idleness are impossible to be retrieved by us, whereas we cannot say that there is such a flux in the other blessings we enjoy.

I wish this matter was seriously considered by all of us. We should not then have among us so many, who are at such a loss how to pass away their time; who are so cloyed with it, that they know not what to do with themselves for many periods of their life, and could be content to be in a state of perfect insensibility during those intervals.—But it will be said, Why do you blame these persons? for they have really nothing to do, they have no employments to follow, they are not under the sad circumstances of being necessitated to drudge and take pains for the getting a livelihood. But is this a sufficient excuse for their being idle? Has not every man in the world work enough to employ himself about all the days of his life, though his life were twice as long as it is? Hath he not a soul to save, and will not securing that concernment put him upon daily study and exercise? Is he not a member of a society, and accordingly is bound to improve all his faculties as much as they are capable, for the doing good to his family, to his country, to the kingdom where he lives? Hath he not a trust to manage with reference to himself, and is bound, as he will answer to God, to make the best improvement he can of those talents of wit and reason, and other endowments, that his Lord hath bestowed upon him? Are there not every day oppor-

tunities put into his hands, which, if he will lay hold of, he may either do good to others or to himself?

We may please ourselves with idle fancies as much as we think good: but the time of our life is rather too short than too long for the work we have to do in it. And though we have been so good husbands of our life as to have secured our main concernment, yet it is impossible we should have any time left, which we may not employ to very good purposes; nay, there is none among us that need to throw away an hour idly, who can either think or meditate, or who can read, discourse, or work, or is fit to keep company, or manage any business, either within or without doors; or who hath any sense of devotion, or hath any skill in any art that is ingenious or ornamental, or can do any thing that is praiseworthy and acceptable to mankind. If there be any who have none of these qualifications, let them be idle, and pass away all their days in sleep, if they think fit; but God help all such as are in such circumstances, for in truth they are very miserable.

But there is another thing to be considered under this head: as every one is to take care that he employ his time, so he must also take care that he employ it innocently. As he is not to spend it idly, much less is he to spend it viciously; for this is worse than the former, or, to speak more properly, it is a pursuance of a bad principle to its worst consequences. We had better do nothing, though that be bad enough, than do an ill thing: and yet, God knows, this we are often too prone to. In order to avoid one extreme, we are apt to run into another. Rather than sit idle,

which is a thing that the heat and briskness of our tempers has a natural aversion to, we will be doing the Devil's work, and helping forwards to our own and other people's undoing: for truly, no better do some among us employ themselves. We hate to sit still; we must busy ourselves some way or other. This is very well; but yet if our business be to spend the time in good fellowship, as we call it, in drinking and revelling, to the prejudice of our health, and the inconvenience of our families, and the unfitting ourselves for the performance of those duties which our station in the world requires of us: if our business be to prosecute any design or intrigue of lust or wantonness, or any ways *making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the unlawful desires of it*: if our business be to go about as tattlers and busybodies in other men's matters, telling stories of this or the other person, and making ourselves pleasant at their charge: if our business be to game and play, or, which is as bad, to design the overreaching of others, and making a gain of them to ourselves in any other, though the more serious way: lastly, if we busy ourselves in any thing that doth not become a Christian, that is contrary to that innocence and purity which the gospel requires of us; in all these instances we had much better have been doing nothing. This kind of business is worse than idleness, and we are so far from well-husbanding our time, that we have the severest account to make for it that is possible.

2. But, secondly, if we would *redeem our time*, it is not enough that we be not idle or ill employed, but we must also make as much as we can of our stock of time, by cutting off from it all those un-

necessary consumptions, in which we are often too lavish of it.

It would make most of us (nay, even those among us who are not addicted to any great vices) very melancholy to sit down and seriously consider in what way the greatest part of our time is spent. As things commonly go, one half of it very near, if not altogether, is taken up in eating and drinking and sleeping; and of the other half, how much of it goes in little impertinent affairs, in idle chat and talk when we are in company, in vain and foolish thoughts and fancies when we are alone, in paying or receiving visits from our acquaintance, in divertisements and recreations, and the like; so that in truth it is but a very little portion of time that most persons (even they who cannot be said to be vicious livers) can give a good account of, as having employed it to any really useful purposes.

I do not deny but there is a time to be allowed for all these things, for they are in their degree and in their season very necessary, or at least very convenient. Without some of them we cannot live; and without others we cannot live so comfortably or so decently. But this is that we complain of, that the custom of the world and our own evil habits have introduced unreasonable and extravagant expenses of our time upon these things. Nature is certainly contented with a moderate portion of sleep; and health will be as well or better preserved, though we do not sit hours at meals, or so frequently engage ourselves in tippling and impertinent conversation. A very little time will serve to apparel us decently; and we may divert ourselves, and enjoy our friends, and perform the necessary civilities we are obliged to,

without making it a sort of an employment. In this therefore will consist a main point of our good husbandry as to our time, viz. to cut off as much of it as we can from these kind of things, to be employed in more serious and profitable ways.

3. And that indeed is the third and the highest degree of *redeeming our time*, viz. that we study to improve all that time we have gained to ourselves, by the retrenching our superfluous expenses of it, to the best and noblest purposes we can put it to.

And truly here lies our main business, if we would effectually *redeem the time*. We must be careful not only to spend it innocently, but also usefully, either to ourselves or others, that being the great end our time was given us for, and the great business we have to pursue in this world. I confess indeed such is the infelicity of some persons, that they know not well how to spend a day to good purposes. But for this they may thank either their bad education or their own carelessness. There is nobody, of what kind of parts or qualities soever, but is capable of becoming very useful, and, I may say, excellent in some way or other, if either their parents would look well to their genius, and suit their education to it; or themselves, after they are come to years of discretion, would observe what they are fitted for, and lay out themselves accordingly.

To give particular instructions or directions in this matter, that may reach every body's case, is more than I can do, or, if I could do it, is more than I should have time for now. But two general points I may lay down, which I am sure all persons, let them be of what rank, or degree, or condition soever they will, are deeply concerned in.

(1.) The first is, that they mind seriously the work of religion and the worship of God. This is their greatest concernment of all, since both their happiness in this life and in the next depends upon it; so that they may be absolutely certain, that whatever time they bestow upon this affair is well spent, and they will never repent it. Is it not infinitely fit and reasonable that he who gave us all our time should have some daily portion of it devoted to him? especially considering that the time thus improved brings in both the greatest pleasure and peace and profit to ourselves that we can possibly reap in any way of spending it. Let us all therefore at all times be sure to attend to our spiritual concernments, whatever other business we neglect; let us take time for meditation, and examining the state of our souls, and fixing our good purposes and resolutions to serve God faithfully all the days of our lives; let us take time for reading the scriptures and other good books, and informing ourselves in every branch of our duty, and the motives and encouragements we have to put it in practice; let us take time for devotion, for praising God for his mercies, for contemplating his excellencies, for imploring his continual grace and assistance, for expressing acts of repentance for our past follies, and dedicating ourselves anew to our Maker. These are truly profitable and gainful exercises, and so much the more to be recommended, because they are natural and easy; every one is capable of employing himself in these things; they require no learning, nor skill, nor parts, nothing in the world but an honest heart; let every one therefore who would husband his time well set out a constant portion of it to be spent in

these works, either more or less, as his condition and way of living is. The more time he has at his command the greater portion of it he ought to devote to pious uses. And if he have but little to spare from his other necessary employments, yet let that little however be given to God and the concernments of the soul.

(2.) But, secondly, would we spend our time to the best purpose? then let us be sure to mind our callings; and that not only out of worldly considerations, (though those be very allowable motives and incitements to a man's diligence in any thing he undertakes,) but also out of conscience: for really to be industrious in the pursuit of our vocations, not to be slothful in business, is a duty we owe to God as well as to ourselves; and the neglect of it is a great sin. A careful and laborious prosecution of a lawful calling in an honest way is not only a means of thriving in the world, and a means to secure us from those temptations to vice and wickedness to which slothful persons are exposed, but it is also an act of religion, and that which doth recommend us to God, and procure his blessing upon us. Nor doth this point only concern mechanics and tradesmen, or magistrates, and those who are in any office or fixed employment, (all which have callings properly so styled,) but also all other men, of what rank soever, though by reason of their quality and estate they sit so loose from the world as not to be engaged in any particular vocation; yet these men have their callings too, which they are bound to attend. Besides the offices and duties of religion which they, above all others, (as having the greatest opportunities,) are to charge themselves with the strictest observance

of, it is fit, nay, it is necessary, they should propose to themselves some useful and commendable designs to pursue in the course of their lives, which is to be their calling and employment. They have great advantages above other men, both for the improving their minds, and for the doing good in their generation. And they may be assured those talents, those advantages shall one day be severely accounted for; and woe be to them if they *have hid their talent in a napkin*. They who have wealth, or power, or interest in the world, do much more influence the affairs of the public than meaner persons. And oftentimes upon their carriage and behaviour the good of the whole neighbourhood, and in proportion the fortune of the kingdom, doth much depend; and therefore they are especially concerned to be careful and prudent in the government of their lives, and industriously to apply themselves to all praiseworthy things which make for the public benefit. They have really a great work to do, if they would well consider it; for besides that they are obliged to be patterns to all others who are about them, and depend upon them, setting them examples of religion, sobriety, humility, modesty, bounty, and charity; and besides that they have greater revenues and larger estates to manage, and greater families to take care of both as to soul and body, which will take up some part of their thoughts and time; and besides the many temptations to idleness and luxury, to pride and vanity, that their fortunes will expose them to, which will require a constant watchfulness to resist, and a great deal of pains to overcome; and, lastly, besides the trouble and the hurry and the ceremony of a daily confluence of company that a

great estate is generally encumbered with, which one who consults his own ease would not buy at any rate, and which, wherever they are, do need a great virtue to support them; I say, besides all these things, there are required greater acquisitions and accomplishments of mind in the nobility and gentry than in others of an inferior rank. As they ought to understand business and conversation better than others, so, if they would not make themselves contemptible, and disparage the place they hold in the world, it is fit that they should be competently learned in all polite and ornamental knowledge; but especially in all that sort of knowledge which will render them useful to their neighbours or to the public: to be ignorant in matters of this nature is a scandal and reproach to them. Now any one who considers these things will not readily say, that a man of estate is without a calling, and hath nothing to do. On the contrary, he must be convinced that those persons have a great deal of very necessary work constantly to employ themselves in. And as the case stands thus with persons of quality of the one sex, so doth it also with those of the other. Women have a calling to follow as well as men; and, if they seriously attend to the several branches of it, they will find that they have little time to lavish away idly; if they seriously consider the duty they owe to God and their own souls, in performing their devotions regularly, and exercising themselves in all the Christian graces and virtues, in order to the securing their everlasting happiness in the world to come; if they consider the duty they owe to the several persons they stand in relation to; to their husbands, in managing the household affairs with

prudence and discretion ; to their children, by bringing them up carefully and virtuously ; to their servants and families, in well governing and providing for them ; to all their neighbours, in being kind and charitable and helpful to them upon all occasions ; (the difficulties and laboriousness of which they will find to be greater in proportion to the greatness of their qualities and fortunes ;) I say, if they consider all this, they will be sensible they have work enough to do, and time little enough to do it in, though they redeem as much as they can from dressing and visits, and the gayeties and pleasures of the world.

Lastly, to draw to a conclusion of my present topic ; as to young persons of both sexes, who are as yet under the wing of their parents, and free from the business and cares of the world, all that has been said concerns them as well as others ; for youth is the time of their laying the foundation of all those good qualities which will enable them afterwards to spend their days innocently and usefully : and if they be not thus trained up, and exercise themselves in an active and serious way of living, there are not so great hopes that they will make the right use of their time when they come to be men and women.

And here I leave the consideration of my text, according to the former interpretation given of it, as *circumspect walking* implies diligence and watchfulness in prosecuting the work of our Christianity in general ; and *redeeming of time* the improving our hours to the best advantage, spending as few of them idly as is possible.

I proceed in the next place to consider the other interpretation of the text, which I mentioned at the

beginning of this Discourse, viz. that it may imply prudence and caution and discretion in the management of ourselves and our affairs with reference to this world, especially in times of difficulty and danger, that by this means we may gain time to ourselves, and avoid the mischiefs that the evil days threaten us with.

I own, that the discourses and sermons that are commonly made upon *redeeming of time* do run upon the former way of interpretation, namely, in that sense in which I have hitherto expounded and treated upon my text; and that it is seldom expounded in this latter sense which I have now given, and am about to consider. But yet, for all this, I must confess, that I think this latter sense is preferable to the other, that it is the true one, and that which the apostle meant in this place.

This phrase ἐξαγοραζόμενοι καιρὸν, which we interpret *redeeming the time*, is but used three times in the whole Bible; once in the Old Testament and twice in the New Testament. In that place where it is used in the Old Testament our interpreters have rightly translated it *gaining the time*. The passage is in Daniel, chap. ii. 8. where, when the magicians could not answer Nebuchadnezzar's question about his dream, but would have put him off, in great anger he tells them, *I know*, says he, *of a certainty that ye would gain the time*. The Chaldee or original word hath plainly this meaning here, though properly and strictly it signifies to *buy the time*, as may be seen in the margin of the Bible: and accordingly Theodotion renders it by the same Greek word which is here used in my text, and which we have translated *redeeming*, but which

might be as properly rendered *gaining the time*. The magicians are said to *gain the time*, because they used delays and other artifices to save themselves from the present displeasure of the king: and in the same sense undoubtedly the word is to be taken in one of the texts of the New Testament, where it is used, viz. Col. iv. 5. and which indeed is exactly parallel to the text we are upon, and is a just exposition of it. There, says the apostle, *Walk in wisdom towards them that are without*, (that is, towards the Jews and Gentiles, among whom ye converse,) *redeeming the time*. *Redeeming the time!* What is that? why gaining the time, avoiding the present dangers you are threatened with by your prudent and wise behaviour.

This now being unquestionably the meaning of the expression in two of the three places where it is used, I think there can be no great doubt but it must have the same meaning in the third, which is my text; and especially if we consider the reason which is here given why it did so much concern all Christians to *walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise*, endeavouring to *redeem the time*, viz. *because the days were evil*. All which things considered lead us to this plain and short paraphrase of my text, wherein, I think, St. Paul's whole meaning is comprehended: Ye are to consider, O Ephesians, that the days you live in are evil days; the times are full of dangers and difficulties: it concerns you therefore, both for your own sake, that you may preserve yourselves, and for your religion's sake, that you may bring honour to it, to *walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise*; to behave yourselves with all the exactness and prudence and discretion that

ye possibly can, that by this means you may *redeem* or *gain time* to yourselves, and avoid the dangers, whether spiritual or temporal, which the evil days will expose you to.

This I take to be the natural meaning of the text; and for authority it hath St. Chrysostom's to vouch for it, who was among the ancients the best interpreter of holy scripture.

Taking now this to be the meaning of my text, the argument I have to treat of from it is, that wisdom and prudence, or that circumspect walking, that Christians are to use in evil and dangerous times, both for securing themselves and bringing honour to their religion.

This would indeed be a difficult argument, if we were to take our measures from the politics of this world, which change as often as the times do change, and which have no fixed rule but just the present interests, and which often put men upon reconciling contradictions, and which are not contrived so much for the honest men as the cunning men of the age. I say, if the Christian politics were of this nature, it would be a presumptuous thing in me to meddle with them: but, God be thanked, the politics of a Christian are quite of another strain; they are the same in all times; they are easily understood by every body; their rules and maxims never clash with one another; and the more honest any man is, the more capable and the better qualified he is for the living up to them: and therefore, without pretending to be one of the wisest men in the world, I may safely venture to give an account of them.

The truth is, all the Christian politics are resolved into one maxim, which every body is well acquaint-

ed with, viz. that a great deal of honesty, mixed with a little discretion, is the best policy. The saying is not the less true because it is grown into a proverb; and I dare say that both the reason and the experience of mankind in all ages, generally speaking, do bear testimony to the truth of it: that God, who in the contrivance of our natures stamped a vigorous sense of virtue and honesty upon our minds, as the great law by which we were to be governed, hath in all ages taken care to give reputation and sanction to that law, by blessing and protecting the honest and virtuous, notwithstanding all the crooked contrivances and machinations of subtle men to the contrary.

But to come to our business. The inquiry is, how St. Paul would have the Christians in his days to behave themselves in evil and difficult times? He tells us in general, that they are to *walk circumspectly*, that is, as we say, cautiously and prudently. But how is this caution and prudence to be expressed? Till that be declared to us, his *trumpet gives but an uncertain sound*, and we are no wiser than we were. I answer, that what St. Paul has here laid down generally, he has in his other writings treated of most particularly; and therefore to these other passages of his we must have recourse for the directing ourselves in the application of this his general precept.

1. The first thing I take notice of in his writings relating to this matter is, that rule of his which he often takes occasion to put the Christians in mind of, viz. that they should avoid, as much as they could, the *giving offence to any*, and make all innocent compliances with those they conversed with. Thus.

he saith to the Philippians, ch. iv. 5. *Let your moderation be known unto all men*; and again, in another place, *As much as in you lieth, live peaceably with all men*, Rom. xii. 18: and again, in another place, *Put them in mind to be gentle, shewing all meekness to all men*, Tit. iii. 1, 2: and, lastly, in another place, says the same apostle, *Give no offence, neither to the Jew, nor to the Gentile, nor to the church of God*, 1 Cor. x. 32. And of this kind of temper and conversation the same St. Paul proposeth himself for an example, *Even*, says he, *as I please all men in all things*, ver. 33. *To the Jews I became as a Jew. To them that are without law, as without law. I am made all things to all men*, chap. ix. 20-22.

The meaning of these and such like speeches is this; that we are to yield to the weakness and necessities of those with whom we converse; not violently striving against the stream in smaller matters, nor affecting a singular and morose behaviour, but being mild and easy in our conversation, rather receding from our little rights than exasperating men against us; suiting our manners, as far as innocently we can, to the times we live in. And thus it is that Grotius expounds the very text I am upon; *Redeem the time*. What is that? why, saith he, *honestis obsequiis vitate pericula*, viz. endeavour to avoid the dangers which threaten you by all decent and innocent compliances.

But then you are to remember that this rule of *giving no offence*, and of *pleasing all men*, is to be understood with these two restrictions.

(1). First of all, that the things wherein we comply with others be things of an indifferent nature, such as may be innocently done or left undone. If they

be things ill in themselves, or forbidden by the laws of God and our religion, then to comply with the world is to conspire against Christ; then to please men is not to be the servants of God. How valuable soever peace and a quiet life may be, yet we are upon no account to stretch a point of conscience for it.

(2.) Secondly, the matters wherein we accommodate ourselves to the humour of others for peace sake must not only be innocent and lawful in themselves, but such also wherein the laws and constitutions of the place have laid no restraint upon us. We owe a great deal to our neighbour, and we ought to comply with him as far as we can, though by so doing we depart from some of our own rights. But yet at the same time we owe a great deal more to the public than we do to any particular person whatsoever, and therefore must not violate the public laws to gratify the best friend we have. There are many things for instance in the outward worship of God, in which, if we were left at our own liberty, we might innocently and prudently condescend to the ignorance or infirmities of others; and it would be sometimes fitting so to do. But if public authority hath interposed and made a rule for us; if the laws have enjoined such a time for worship, or such a form of prayer, or such gestures, or garments, or the like; here to swerve from our rule, because others do not like it, and to do things of our own head for the humouring them, is a thing not becoming the modesty of any Christian.

The only reflection I make upon what I have now said is this: if it be unreasonable to break public rules and laws, though never so indifferent in them-

selves, for compliance sake, how much more unlawful and intolerable must it be to dissemble or depart from our religion for the humouring of others. There are some, I doubt, who are for carrying this principle of compliance so far, as to think fit to be always of that religion which is most in fashion. So long as the protestant faith is established by law, and countenanced by the government, they will be zealous for that: but if popery (nay, perhaps Turcism) should get the ascendant, and come in the place of it, they could without much difficulty change their sides. This, I grant, is a very easy and expeditious way to save ourselves whole and harmless in all times. And if there was no such thing as honesty and conscience in the world, it might be very advisable; but no man who hath any sense or regard to either of these can possibly think of it without abhorrence. This I must observe, that the primitive Christians were so tender of compliances in matters of religion, and this point of the open profession of it (when they were called to it) was then thought so necessary, that any among them who did but so much as throw a grain of incense upon the heathen altars, (which was interpreted as a sacrificing to their gods,) though it was for the saving of his life, was presently excluded the communion of Christians; nay, though a man did not sacrifice, but only accepted a ticket or certificate from the officers that he had done so; I say, even complying thus far was looked upon and reputed so great an affront to Jesus Christ, that the man was ranked among the apostates; and so were all those likewise who delivered up their Bibles to the persecutors upon any account whatsoever. And these three sorts of persons I have named were the *thu-*

rificati, the *libellatici*, and the *traditores*, which we so often meet with in the ecclesiastical writers.

O, therefore, let it be an immoveable principle within us in all times to be constant to that which we take to be the true religion. *Let us hold the profession of our faith without wavering.* Let no prospect of worldly gain or advantage, let no persuasions or insinuations of friends, no concernments of our families and children, no terrors of persecution, or death itself, make us fall from our own steadfastness. Let us remember what our blessed Lord hath told all his disciples, *Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven*, Matt. x. 32. *But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father and the angels of God*, Luke xii. 8. But thus much of my first head: I proceed to the next.

2. Another point of Christian wisdom and circumspection in evil times, recommended by St. Paul, we shall find to be this; viz. the preservation, as much as is possible, of love and unity among those who are of the same religion. There is nothing that he more presseth in all his Epistles, as a means both for preserving the church in the evil times which were then, and for recommending Christianity to the adversaries of it, than that those who professed it should be firmly united among themselves: *that they should be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, and of one mind*; so he speaks in the second chapter to the Philippians, ver. 2; that they should *put on bowels of mercies, and forbear one another in love: endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*; so he

speaks in the fourth to the Ephesians, ver. 2, 3. It had been happy for Christendom if this point had been always carefully observed. The divisions of Christians among themselves have done more hurt to Christ's religion than all the force and malice of its open enemies could ever do. And as it stands with Christianity in general, so doth it with any church in particular: love and unity among the members of it is the surest expedient, both to preserve them from common danger, and to support them under it. On the contrary, *divide et impera*, (as the saying is,) do but break them into parties and factions, do but fill them with variance and hatred and animosities one against another, and you open an easy passage for a common enemy to enter in among them; or if he be there already, you give him occasion to exercise greater severity and rigour than perhaps otherwise would have been thought reasonable: nay, it frequently happens, where such parties and breaches are, that not only a way is opened for an enemy to enter, but one of the parties brings him in, and turns persecutor of the brethren. Men care not what they do, so that they can but oppress the opposite party which at that time stands most in their way, though it be to their own undoing at the long run. This is fairly intimated by St. Paul to the Galatians; *If, says he, ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another*, Gal. v. 15. His caution implies that there is no necessity, in order to the ruin of a church or nation, that the members thereof should always fall into the hands of them who wish them ill; for they themselves, by their unseasonable and bitter quarrels, may oftentimes do the work.

3. But, in the third place, among the points of prudent walking in evil times we ought not to omit that which St. Paul orders Titus to put the Christians in those days in especial remembrance of; *Put them in mind*, says he, ch. iii. 1. *to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates.* And St. Peter likewise lays the same charge upon those to whom he writes with reference to the evil times they lived in; *Submit yourself to every ordinance of man: whether to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him.—For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*, 1 Peter ii. 13, 14, 15. Nothing did more recommend Christianity in the world than the peaceableness and loyalty of its principles. Had it been a peevish, unquiet, seditious, and turbulent religion; had it countenanced discontent or faction, or allowed its proselytes to oppose the government, or even to complain or shew themselves uneasy under the administration of it; it had never so happily weathered out the storms that were raised against it, and got such kind entertainment in the world. The enemies of it did indeed endeavour to possess the minds of those who were strangers to it with a belief that it had an evil aspect upon the secular power, and that the promoters of it were a company of ill-affected persons; but if they could have made good this charge, they had in all probability done their work, and put a stop to the growth of that religion which was destitute of all worldly advantages for the making its way. But the quite contrary did appear both in the doctrines which it taught, and in the lives of all those who took it upon them. Never did any reli-

gion, nor any subjects, give such security to princes and states of the enjoyment of all their natural rights, as the Christian religion and the Christian subjects did. From whence it was manifest, that this was the best contrived, and fitted to be the religion of the world, and that all men who would prove good subjects indeed must turn Christians. Since therefore such is the nature of the Christian religion, so obedient, so submissive to authority in its principles; and since such advantages may be expected to the Christians themselves, and to the world, by living up to these principles, it cannot but infinitely concern all who profess this religion to be very careful in this point; to give no occasion to the higher powers to look upon them as enemies, or as disaffected to their interests; but, on the contrary, cheerfully to own the government which gives them protection, and both in thought and word and deed to pay all faithful allegiance to it. The Christians thought this to be both their duty and their interest in the very worst of times, when they had no better princes to rule over them than such men as Caligula and Nero. How much more then ought we to charge ourselves with the practice of it, who are in so much happier circumstances, both with relation to our government, and our princes who administer it!

4. Another particular that falls under the general rule of *walking circumspectly, and redeeming the time, because the days are evil*, is that which is recommended by St. Paul in these words; *I beseech you, brethren, says he, that ye study to be quiet, and mind your own business; that ye may walk honestly towards them that are without*, 1 Thess.

iv. 11, 12; as much as to say, that the way to recommend yourselves *to them who are without*, and to make them think honourably of you, is *to study to be quiet*, and *to mind your own business*. This is an excellent rule of wisdom at all times, but more especially in times of danger or difficulty. Let every man disentangle himself, as much as he can, from all sorts of quarrels and embroilments, and from all things that may probably occasion them. Let every man consult his own ease and repose among his neighbours, by giving no disturbance to them, and avoiding, as much as is possible, disturbance from them. Lastly, let every man dwell at home as much as his circumstances will give him leave, and mind his own affairs, (which will find him work enough to do,) but meddle as little as possible with things that are foreign, and which do nothing concern him : I say, let every man do thus, and he shall find the sweet and the comfort and convenience of so doing, let him live in what times he will. They who are busybodies in other men's matters create trouble and mischief to themselves in the best of times, and therefore much more may they expect to reap the ill consequences of their pragmatrical humour when the times are ticklish and boisterous. The way to live quietly and peaceably is to sit still, and take what comes without murmuring ; to hear and to see, but without making spiteful observations and reflections ; to be very careful of our words, that they do not needlessly grieve or provoke any ; especially to be in all cases tender of our neighbour's reputation as of our own. But they who give themselves a liberty of talking about every thing and every person what their own ungoverned

passion or humour suggests to them; and they who will be invading other men's offices, and giving their advice where it is not asked, and meddling with affairs they have nothing to do with; they who are perpetually complaining of the times, and quarrelling with the present constitution of things; they who make it their business to inquire into the slips or vices either of public or private persons, and will always have something to insinuate to the disadvantage either of the one or the other; I say, this sort of people, as they do a great deal of mischief to the public, so it cannot but be expected that by their too much meddling they should now and then burn their own fingers. To conclude this point, to study to be quiet and mind our own business is as likely a means as any to preserve a man from all the outward inconveniences that the times can expose him to. But if it be ineffectual that way, and the man cannot avoid suffering, yet he had better suffer thus than otherwise; nay, he ought to thank God that he so suffer: *Let none of you*, says St. Peter, 1 Epist. iv. 15, 16. *suffer as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. But if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on that behalf.*

5. But, lastly, in speaking to this argument, I ought not to omit another thing, which seems fairly to be hinted to us by St. Paul, as a very proper means of *redeeming the time in evil days*; viz. a more than ordinary diligence and exactness in our whole conversation. His words in the text are ἀκριβῶς περιπατεῖτε, which if we would render strictly, it must be thus; *See that ye walk accurately, that ye walk exactly*; that is to say, Let your

conversation be regular and irreproachable in all things, suitable to the copy that Christ our Lord hath set before you to follow, and suitable to the holiness and purity of that religion which you profess. As Christians are to have a regard to their whole conversation at all times, so are they especially in evil and dangerous times: they should then especially endeavour to *adorn the doctrine of God in all things*, as St. Paul elsewhere speaks, Titus ii. 10; that is, to set it out to its best advantage: they should not sully the native beauty of it by any corrupt or mean or undecent conversation, but give the world a fair view of its amiableness and goodness by their innocent and unspotted lives: nay, they should set it out to the best advantage, making it by all exemplary virtues and graces to appear 'so charming to those they converse with, that they may fall in love with it: *I beseech you*, (says St. Peter, 1 Epist. ii. 11, 12.) *as strangers and pilgrims*, (being as it were in a strange country, and amongst many enemies,) *abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles. Honest*; how is that? Why, laudable, commendable, honourable, such as may be well thought of among the Gentiles; just as St. Paul useth the same phrase in the twelfth of the Romans, ver. 17. *Provide things honest in the sight of all men*; that is, take care that all your matters be so decently managed, as that they may be approved of, and well reported among men. And this sense the following words of St. Peter, 1 Epist. ii. 12. do confirm, *That whereas*, says he, *they*, viz. the Gentiles, *speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good*

works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Here then is the province that is committed to all of us ; this is the work that God hath put us upon : we are to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*, Tit. ii. 10 : we are to recommend our religion to all about us, not only by living free from blame, but by abounding in all virtue, and in all good works. Hear, I pray, what St. Peter speaks to this purpose in the third chapter of his First Epistle, ver. 10—13. quoting a passage out of the Psalms ; *He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile : let him eschew evil, and do good ; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous ; and who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good ?* There is certainly great sense and reason in these advices ; and all the men in the world cannot prescribe more effectual methods for the procuring a peaceful, happy life to a man's self, or blessings to his country, than these are : for by thus doing, we take the surest way not only to recommend ourselves to men ; but, which is more than that, we take the surest way to approve ourselves to God, who certainly both takes care of his church and us ; and who doth so order the affairs of the world, that he will never suffer any thing to come to pass upon earth, but what shall prove for the good of his church, and of all particular persons who truly love and fear him.

Let us all therefore apply these rules to ourselves : let us live up to our principles. Let us not barely make a noise and a talk of what we believe and profess ; but let us shew to all the world that we

have the true faith of Christ among us, by bringing forth such fruit in our lives, as his holy doctrine and religion doth naturally tend to produce among mankind: let us do nothing that is bad, nothing that hath even the appearance of evil. Whatever seems to be unjust, or even hard to those we deal with, let us forbear it; whatever looks like knavery or a trick, let us avoid it. Let our words and actions be all of a piece, being true to our words, and sincere in our professions of kindness: let us be ready to do acts of humanity and kindness and charity as often as they fall in our power: let us forgive injuries, and endeavour *to heap coals of fire on the heads of those that do them*, Rom. xii. 20; that is, by our generous obliging treatment of them, melt them into reconciliation and friendship with us; for that is the method, they say, of melting the hardest metal, by heaping coals of fire on the top of it. Let us be regular in all our conversation, setting examples of piety and devotion, of temperance and purity, of moderation and contentedness, of humility and affability and meekness to all above us. In a word, *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, honest, and of good report; if there be any praise, any virtue, let us follow these things*, Philipp. iv. 8. This is the true and proper way both to secure ourselves, and to do honour and service to our religion in all times whatsoever: *Who shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?* 1 Peter iii. 13. The Christian religion is a thing so amiable, and its precepts so extremely agreeable to the nature of mankind, that, wherever they are lived up to, they will by degrees mollify the heart of the most obdu-

rate, and conciliate love and respect, at least tenderness and compassion, from all sorts of men. Let the times be what they will, the better a man lives, the more upright and just, the more humble and peaceable, the more devout and charitable, the more innocent and virtuous he is, the better he is like to fare in this world. But however that happens, this comfort such a man hath, that he is of all others the fittest to conflict with a storm ; and if it pleases God that he fall under it, blessed, unspeakably blessed shall he be, for exceeding great shall his reward be in the other world.

A DISCOURSE

ON

PROVERBS XXVIII. 13.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper : but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy.

THIS is undoubtedly one of those texts of scripture which is referred to in the exhortation before morning and evening service in our Common Prayer Book: “Dearly beloved brethren, the scripture moveth us “in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our “manifold sins and wickedness, and that we should “not dissemble and cloak them before the face of “Almighty God our heavenly Father, but confess “them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart.” For certainly the text speaks of *covering* and *confessing* our sins with respect to God, and not with respect to men. Indeed, to conceal our sins from men, except in the case of injuries done to our neighbour, (and there we are bound to acknowledge our fault, and make satisfaction,) is so far from a fault, that in many cases it would be great imprudence not to do it; since to make them public might do a great deal of hurt both to ourselves and others.

And as for confession to a minister, (though that is always lawful, and sometimes highly expedient; and if people among us did more practise it, there is no doubt they would find both great comfort and great benefit thereby; yet,) it cannot reasonably be thought to be intended in this place; and some of

the papists themselves, and those the most learned of them, do in plain terms acknowledge as much, telling us, that these words of Solomon are not spoken of auricular or sacramental confession, because the sacrament of penance was not in being at that time, but was instituted by Christ long after. So that he doth not here speak of *confessing our sins* to men, but to God; that being the confession that is everywhere in the Old Testament insisted on as a necessary expression of our repentance. So also the *covering our sins* which we are here cautioned against, and which is opposed to confessing, must be the covering them with respect to God: *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth them and forsaketh them shall find mercy.*

In speaking to which words I shall shew,

I. First, What is meant by *covering, cloaking, or dissembling our sins*, together with the danger of so doing: *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.*

II. Secondly, What kind of confession that is which is here made an essential part of repentance towards God; and how it comes to be so necessary: *Whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy.*

I. First of all, What is meant by *covering our sins*; or, as our Liturgy expresses it, “dissembling” and cloaking them before the face of Almighty “God.” For here a question ariseth, How can any man cover or hide his sins from God?

To which I answer, That truly and literally speaking he cannot; for, as St. Paul tells us, *all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do*, Heb. iv. 31. He sees every action of our lives, and hears every word of our mouths,

and understands every thought of our hearts. So that to hide any thing from God is perfectly impossible; and he is a fool, and ignorant of the nature of God, who thinks to do it: but yet such fools and ignorants many of us are, that though we cannot conceal any thing from God, we may desire it, and we may endeavour it; at least we may be so stupid, so inattentive, so very careless of our own actions, as to think that, because we do not look into them, God will not; because we do not see them amiss in ourselves, God doth not; and because we are willing to make the best we can of our own state, to think that God will be willing to do so likewise: and this, in scripture language, is a *covering of sins*. Though we cannot, in a strict and proper sense, cover our sins from God, yet we may do it interpretatively; that is, we may use such arts for the palliating our sins, that, in God's account, will amount to the same thing as if we thought or endeavoured to blind the eyes of his sovereign Majesty, so as that he should not see them. It is worth the while to explain this matter a little more particularly, and to give an account of the several ways in which men may, in this sense, be said to *cover their sins*. By which means we shall be the better able to examine our own consciences about this point, and where we find ourselves guilty, there to make application to ourselves.

1. First of all: a man may be said to *cover his sins* when he hath no sense of them; when he is so little apprehensive of his faults that he will not own them to be such; but is as easy and unconcerned about them as if he was perfectly innocent.

And this happens two ways: either through a

stupid inadvertency, or through an overweening conceit that hath possessed a man of his own righteousness and goodness.

In the former of these ways the adulterous woman, that Solomon describes in the thirtieth of Proverbs, ver. 20, covered her sins : *She eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.* And this, God knows, is the case of some among us, (though I hope they are not many.) They live in a course of profaneness and wickedness, following their brutish devices and desires in every thing, without any regard to God or to good manners. They stick at nothing that may please their humour or gratify their lust, be it never so wicked, supposing that they keep within such compass that the law shall not take hold of them ; and so far are they from being uneasy and troubled at this course of life, or owning themselves to be great sinners before God upon account of these things, that they rather stare and wonder at any one that shall blame them for these extravagances. God help such poor wretches, for there is no human means left to help them ! These men do continually cover their sins, and are just in the same condition with those that God speaks of in the prophet Jeremy, chap. viii. 6. *I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright : no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done ? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.* O a sad condition is this, (even the worst on this side hell,) when a man pursues a wicked course with the same insensibility of danger, with the same unconcernedness and fury, with which a *horse rusheth into the battle !*

The other thing that often occasions the *covering*

of our sins in this way, (viz. renders us insensible of them,) is, an opinion that we have taken up of our own righteousness and good qualities, which doth so fill our minds that we have no leisure to reflect on our miscarriages. Of this we have a notable instance in the Pharisee that our Saviour brings in as going with a *Publican into the temple to pray*, Luke xviii.

10. This Pharisee, instead of acknowledging his sins to God, (as he ought to have done, and as the Publican did,) had other matters to think of. He was so full of himself and his own performances that he never reflected on any thing wherein he had offended against God; but, on the contrary, instead of condemning himself, he *despised others*, and particularly that poor Publican: *he thanked God that he was not such a one as he*, ver. 11: he thanked God that he was not guilty of any open, scandalous sin; and mightily did he magnify his fasting and his devotion, and his other good actions, ver. 12. This now was *a covering of his sins*; and he sped accordingly: for notwithstanding this magnificent opinion he had of his devout and strict way of living, the other poor sinner, that *durst not look up to heaven, but smote his hand upon his breast, crying out, God be merciful to me a sinner: this man returned to his house justified*, and accepted of God, when the other was rejected, ver. 13, 14.

I need make no application of this to our present purpose, it is so plain. But I desire every one who is concerned in it would do it; and I only add this: let us all look to it, how we cover our sins in this way, (viz. by not acknowledging ourselves sinners, but being insensible of our faults and of our guilt,) upon what pretences soever it be; whether it be

that we are really so bad that we have lost all sense and discrimination between good and evil, as it was in the former case I mentioned; or whether it be that we think ourselves so perfect that we see no sin in ourselves, as in the latter case; I say, let us all have a care of this upon the admonition that St. John gives us in this matter, and I wish we would all remember it: *If, says he, we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we do confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

2. But, in the second place, a man is said to *cover his sins* not only when he denies them, or thinks himself not guilty of them, but when he excuses them, when he makes apologies for them, when he sets himself to find out reasons to justify himself for the commission of them.

Of this we have a remarkable instance in king Saul, who, when he had transgressed the command of God in sparing Agag the king of the Amalekites, and the *best of the spoils* that were taken in the war, 1 Sam. xv. and Samuel comes from God to reprove him for it, and to charge him with disobedience and rebellion against God for doing it, though he could not deny the fact that he was charged with, nor could deny that it was expressly against God's order, yet nevertheless insisted stiffly upon this, that he had not done ill in doing what he did; for as for the sparing of the king, it was but an act of humanity and mercy; and as for the booty that was taken, he thought it a piece of religion and piety *to save the best of the sheep and the oxen for sacrifices to the Lord*, ver. 15. Thus he justified himself.

But did the prophet approve of this justification? No, far from it. On the contrary, he tells him plainly, that *to obey the voice of God was more delightful to him than all sacrifices and burnt-offerings*, ver. 22. And *that rebellion against a divine command was as the sin of witchcraft*; and *because he had thus rejected the command of God, therefore God had rejected him from being king*, ver. 23. This was the consequence of Saul's sin, and of his *covering it*. You see *he did not prosper*.

But thus are we in these days too apt to *cover our sins*. When we have done things forbidden by the laws of God, such things as we know we cannot justify; (if the scripture and the light of nature be to guide us;) yet, when we come to reflect upon those actions, it shall be hard but we will find some righteous, or some necessary end or other, that we had in our minds and intentions when we did those actions, that will clear us from all blame concerning them; either the necessity of the times, or the necessity of our own circumstances, or the serving our friends, or the shewing our zeal for religion, or some such other warrantable cause, put us upon those proceedings, which otherwise we should not have ventured upon. And when we can once say, I had a good end and intention in what I did, or it was necessary for me to do it, or that good ends were served thereby, and God in his providence gave me the success I desired; why these considerations (let the action in itself have been never so bad) do so buoy up a man's spirits against all the reflections which otherwise his conscience would be apt to make upon such an action, that really he cannot call himself to account for it, nor confess it before

God as a sin. But this is but another way of *covering of sin*; and he that useth it *shall not prosper*. Let us all know and remember, that no necessity, no conveniency, no good ends, will ever justify an action that is bad in itself. St. Paul having long ago told us, that *those which do evil that good may come, their damnation is just*, Rom. iii. 8.

3. But, thirdly, a man may be truly said to *cover his sins* when he doth what he can to extenuate them; when, though he doth not justify them as in the former case, yet he lessens them; when, instead of representing to God or to himself his own wickedness and manifold miscarriages in their just dimensions, and with their just circumstances, he is wholly intent upon those points that take off from the heinousness of them, and would seem to render that which was a crime to be but a venial sin.

And thus really men do frequently deal with God and with themselves. They are apt to say of their sins as Lot, when he saw Sodom on fire, once said of the city Zoar, which he would have had preserved, *Is it not a little one? and my soul shall live*, Gen. xix. 20.

To what purpose but this were all those soft and genteel terms invented by which we usually censure great and notorious sins both in ourselves and others! How usual is it to represent faults of a more than ordinary malignity by such easy characters as shall affright nobody from the doing of them! How many wilful, deliberate transgressions are not only called, but thought to be sins of surprise or pure infirmity! A course of drunkenness and debauchery passes often for no more than an excess of sociableness, or a little too much good-nature; and

the worst brand of it is, that the poor man who is guilty of it is the least kind to himself. Do not many of us excuse our violent, ungovernable passions, our furious, wrathful, quarrelsome, uneasy conversation to all about us, by such soft censures as these; that, alas! we are of something too hasty a disposition, and are too apt to be put out of humour? Doth not intolerable uncharitableness and censoriousness often pass under no heavier a name than of a little too much freedom of speech, without any other mark of infamy? What, amongst a great many, is pride and contempt of others, but only reservedness of temper? covetousness and oppression, but only frugality and careful management of one's affairs? uncleanness and fornication, but only a heat and folly of youth? And abundance of other instances of this kind may be given.

And as we thus lightly pass censures upon the greatest sins, whether of ourselves or others, in our discourses, so it is much to be feared we have the same apprehensions between God and ourselves when we come to reflect upon them, and to exercise acts of repentance for them: even in this case how extremely apt are we to catch at every twig, to take advantage of every circumstance that any ways seems to contribute to the alleviating the sins that we find ourselves burdened with! What new and uncouth measures have we made to ourselves for the estimating the greatness or littleness of sins! We do not make a judgment of them by the word of God and the rules of reason, but by other fantastic rules, by the commonness and frequency of them among mankind, by the reputation they have in the world, by our own inclinations and tempers, and by

the powerfulness of the temptations by which we were solicited to them.

As for instance : if we be among the number of the common sinners ; if our sins be of that kind that we see daily and every where practised among us, why then it naturally falls into our minds that we are not the first nor the only persons that are guilty of this fault. There are thousands about us that are as deeply concerned in this matter as we ; and sure, where so many are concerned, the punishment will not light so heavy upon one. If it be a fashionable sin we are engaged in, a sin that hath gained credit and reputation among the generality of men, why still that doth more either vindicate us or excuse us ; for what prudence is it for any man in this age to be singular ? Who can bear the taunts and derisions that will be thrown upon us for not complying with the humour of the times, but living like men of another world ? If we be in the briskness and gayety of our youth when we thus fly out into extravagant actions, why that is a salvo for them all. A trick of youth is always at least excusable ; as our juvenile heats wear off, and our judgment increases, we shall of ourselves return to more sober counsels. In the mean time both God and the world will pardon our youthful extravagancies. If the iniquities we labour under be those which we are prompted to by our particular tempers and inclinations, why sure we shall never be called to a strict account for them, since it is not in any man's power to alter or new model his constitution. At the worst, this is but an human frailty, which every man in our circumstances is too apt to fall into.

But what are all these pleas and pretences, but so

many instances of covering our sins? If we meant honestly, and dealt with uprightness between God and our souls, we should not be thus sagacious in contriving ways to mitigate our offences, nor so forward to make use of them if they were contrived to our hands. A sincere honest penitent would think of none of these things, at least he would not regard them. The main thing he would consider, would be his strict duty, and what obligations he had to perform it: what the laws of God and Jesus Christ had obliged him to; and what strength and power he had to live up to those laws, and how highly he was engaged, by the oath he had taken to Jesus Christ, so to live: what solemn vows and resolutions he had made to renounce the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and to yield up himself entirely to the service of his Saviour. Such an honest man would not insist much on the corruptions of the times, and the bad examples before him, and the strength of natural inclinations, and the like; but he would think seriously of his duty, and what his conscience had often suggested to him about it, and what assistances God in his word had made over to him by his holy Spirit for the performing of it, and how intolerably he should be self-condemned if he did neglect it.

I say, if we were honest and true-hearted to God and our own eternal interests, we should reflect upon these things. We should estimate our sins and failings by these rules, and not judge of them by those common measures which loose and sensual minds have found out for the lessening and extenuating of them.

4. But, fourthly and lastly, there is another way

of covering our sins not unfit to be mentioned in this place, because it is too frequently practised ; and that is, by taking the blame off from ourselves, and laying it upon others. Though we are not ignorant of the fault, neither do justify it, nor yet extenuate it, yet we are loath it should lie with all its load upon our own shoulders, and therefore prudently transfer it upon those that were some way or other either tempters to it or occasions of it.

To give you an instance from scripture of this kind of covering of sins : Adam, our first parent, had no sooner fallen in paradise by eating the forbidden fruit, but when God came to chide him for his fault, he had his answer ready, that it was not so much his fault as Eve's : *The woman*, says he, *that thou gavest me to be with me*, she tempted me, *and gave me of the forbidden tree, and I did eat*, Gen. iii. 12. By this first instance of sin in the world, we may learn how natural it is for men to rid the blame and the guilt of their evil actions off from themselves, and to lay it upon others. And let us all examine our own consciences, whether this also be not frequently practised among us : how very ordinary is it, when we are thinking of those things that are apt to trouble our consciences and make us uneasy, to make just such a defence for ourselves as Adam here did. If we can but find out either an author or a partner or an occasion of our sin, we are well enough. With some men, the course of life they are engaged in, the necessary, unavoidable temptations that their business or employment doth expose them to, is thought a just sufficient reason to exempt them from the practice of those strict rules of virtue and piety that other Christians take

themselves to be obliged to. With others, that set of company and acquaintance they are linked with is an apology for all the extravagancies they run into. Saith the one sort, If I was of another calling, had I but another profession, I should certainly avoid those sins that I now daily fall into. Saith the other, If I had not such continual temptations from my friends and acquaintance, I should certainly be another kind of man than I am. All this may be true, so far as we can judge of such contingencies. But yet notwithstanding, if we think this seriously, and make it our apology to God Almighty for our daily sins, we do but juggle with him, and do not deal so uprightly and sincerely as we ought to do. For I would fain know what state of life is there that will not yield the same matter of excuse for the faults we are guilty of. What condition in the world can we imagine ourselves to be placed in, wherein we should not have the same pretences, and still should have found out somebody, or some things, besides ourselves, to have borne the blame of our sins and irregularities? No; all this is still a covering of our sins, an unwillingness to find ourselves guilty: such a self-love and tenderness of our own ease as will do us no good in the world; for when all is done, *he that covereth his sins shall not prosper.*

Let us now make application of these things to ourselves: and what application can that be but this? If we be all sinners, as I am sure there is not one that now hears me but is so, what have we all to do but to humble ourselves before God, acknowledging that we are miserable, sinful creatures, and that if he should deal with us according to our de-

serts, we must expect nothing but indignation and woe.

For, alas! the very best actions of our lives, if they were to be scanned according to the exactness of his law and the perfection of his holiness, would yield us but little comfort, they being all some way or other faulty. We have nothing to fly unto but the boundless compassion of our gracious God, (through our Lord Jesus Christ,) whose mercy is over all his works, and is, like his majesty, truly infinite. To him therefore let us go: to him let every one of us address himself with the poor Publican, *Lord be merciful to me a sinner*, Luke xviii. 13. Let us say with Job, *I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou Preserver of men?* Job vii. 20. *I abhor myself in dust and ashes*, chap. xlii. 6. Let us say with the prodigal, *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy child*, Luke xv. 21. Let us say with David, *Out of the deep do I call to thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice. If thou shouldest be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?* Ps. cxxx. 1, 2, 3. O therefore *enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified*, Ps. cxliii. 2. *But there is mercy with thee, therefore thou shalt be feared*, Ps. cxxx. 4.

Ah! my brethren, if we had true notions of ourselves and of our own condition, and made a fair and just representation to our minds of God's infinite holiness and purity, and of our own sinfulness and impurity, we should all be thus affected.

Away therefore with all thoughts of covering our sins; let us, on the contrary, with grief and sorrow

of heart, expose them ; to God, I mean, let us expose them. Let us unburden ourselves to him, and with contrition and devotion acknowledge our own guilt, and beg his pardon.

II. And this brings me to my second inquiry in my proposed method ; viz. what kind of confession that is which is made in the text an essential part of repentance ; *whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy.*

For it may be justly asked, Is confession any thing else but the telling God that we have offended him ? And how comes this to be so meritorious a thing ? Is not contrition and sorrow for sin of a great deal more value than this comes to ? And is not resolution against sin still more fit to enter the definition of repentance ? and yet these things are not named.

My answer to this is, That it is very certain that contrition for sin, and resolution against it, are every jot as necessary to a true repentance as the confessing of it is. But this we are to remember, that confession, both in the scripture notion of it and in the reason of the thing, doth contain and include in it both these things.

We are much mistaken in the nature of this confession, if we make it to be no more than an acknowledgment, or repetition, or enumeration of our sins before God : (though I grant that the word, in its first and proper signification, expresses no more :) no : this is the least of that which is implied in this, when it is accounted a part of repentance.

If confession was no more than a particular, distinct acknowledgment of our sins to God, then that would be the best confession that gave the most

punctual account of every the least minute circumstance that happens in the sinful action : he would confess best that could tell best the story of his sins. But, alas! there is nothing in this that can recommend us unto God. When we speak of confession of sins as a means of obtaining pardon for them, we mean by it such an actual attention to our sins and to our guilt, and such an hearty acknowledgment thereof to God Almighty, as includes in it both shame and sorrow for what we have done, and likewise steadfast purpose of heart to do so no more. To confess our sins, is to own with shame and confusion of face that we have transgressed the righteous laws of God, and deserve his wrath and displeasure, and so far to dislike, to disapprove, and to detest our own actions, that we severely purpose never to be guilty of the like again.

We need not be long to seek what kind of confession that is which my text speaks of, if we will but attend to what we require of one another in cases of affronts and offences done to ourselves. Supposing a man hath done some great injury to us in word or deed, upon which we are grievously offended with him, so far that we break off all those terms of friendship and amity with the man which were between us before : he desires to be reconciled to us, and, in order to that, common sense teacheth him to come and acknowledge his fault; and accordingly he doth so, and we accept of his confession as a good satisfaction : what is it now that moves and inclines us so to do? Is it that he hath told us some things that we knew not before? No; for we did sufficiently know all his unhandsome carriage to us, and that made us out of charity with him : is it that

he doth in a handsome speech, and with many rhetorical amplifications, set forth the particulars of the injury, and tell us what first inclined him, what neighbour encouraged him, with what intrigues and circumstances the whole business was carried on? Why in this he may shew himself a very artificial man in telling a story; but this alone causeth no relenting in us. He may tell us all this, and in as good words, by way of drollery or defiance: that which works upon us to forgive the man the injury that he did us, is purely and solely the mind with which this confession is made. We see that he is heartily sorry for what he hath done; he is ashamed of it, and by this confession doth what he can to undo it again: he heartily wishes that he had never done it; and was it to do again, he would abhor the thoughts of doing it. This now is some compensation to us; nay, it is really the best satisfaction he can make us: and upon this consideration of the man's repentance we do repent also, and forgive him.

Now just upon the same account that we value or accept the confession of offenders towards ourselves, doth God accept of the confession of our offences towards him: namely, the virtue and acceptableness of it doth not lie in the material confession itself, but in the disposition of the heart and mind wherewith it is tendered. By this we may, in some measure, see what confession that is to which a pardon of sin is in the text promised. It is not barely a repetition of the faults we are guilty of to God Almighty; nay, though that repetition be made never so often or never so particularly: but it is such an acknowledgment of our faults as is accompanied

with shame for them, with hatred to them, and with resolutions to amend them. So that confession of sin doth plainly include in it three things.

First, that we be heartily sensible of our sins past, and sorry for them, and angry at ourselves for having committed them : and this is that which in common speech we call *contrition*.

Secondly, that this sense, and this sorrow, and this indignation, do put us upon applying ourselves to God, and there with shame and confusion laying open our miserable condition before him, and humbly and heartily begging his mercy and favour through the merits and intercession of our Lord Jesus : and this is that which is *confession* in the precise strict sense of the word.

Thirdly, that at the same time we enter into steadfast and serious purposes to amend what hath been amiss in us, and to live more carefully, more obediently to the laws of God for the future : and this is that which is called *resolution*.

And now having thus explained the nature of confession, we have a fair and easy way opened to us for resolving the other part of our inquiry in this matter ; and that is, how confession comes to be so necessary, so indispensable a part of repentance. For it is easy to be collected, from what has been said, that confessing our sins in this manner is, in the reason of the thing, a point so necessary, that we are noways qualified for the obtaining forgiveness of them without it.

Can that man be in any sense capable of mercy that either stands upon his own vindication, or is so little sensible of his fault that he will not so much as make acknowledgment of it ? There is no man,

that so behaves himself, can expect to find the least favour from any earthly tribunal before which he is convened, though the matter for which he is called in question be of never so small a concernment. And can we expect that the supreme Lord of the world will pass by offences done against his infinite majesty, and in contempt of his eternal laws, upon easier terms?

Whosoever doth not sorrowfully confess and acknowledge his sins cannot in any sense be said to repent of them: and sure without repentance there can be no forgiveness. If it be said that repentance consists in the *forsaking of sin*, and not in the *confessing of it*, I answer with a divine of our own, "that that may indeed be the notion of a heathen repentance:" for the pagans, it is confessed, took very little notice of this part of religion which we are now talking of: but it is far from being the repentance that God hath prescribed to mankind in the Old and New Testament. Nor indeed would any of us accept of such a repentance ourselves, (if it may in any sense be called by that name.) We should not think ourselves well dealt with, in case of any injury done to us, that the man who had affronted us once did so no more: but we expect that he should acknowledge his first fault, as well as that he should reform it.

I do not say that we can justly stand upon this, or require these terms of reconciliation from our brethren: but it is infinitely fit and reasonable that God should from his creatures. We are bound to forgive one another; but God is not bound to forgive us: that which is in us an act of duty is in him an act of free grace and mercy. If therefore it be supposed

that we are all sinners towards God, and stand in need of his mercy, and that we shall not find mercy without repentance of our sins, it will follow that our repentance must as well look backwards as forwards; that is to say, we must not only look to the reforming of our life for the future, (for that can do no more than prevent the displeasure of God for the time to come,) but we must also look to the undoing, as well as we can, our forepast sins, in order to the obtaining God's forgiveness of them. But this is no way in the world to be done but by meekly and humbly and sorrowfully confessing them.

And accordingly this is the condition that God in scripture every where requires in order to the granting his pardon and mercy for our former transgressions: *If we confess our sins*, says St. John, *he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins*, 1 Epist. i. 9. And thus also David, *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity I did not hide. I said, I will confess my sin unto the Lord; and so thou forgavest me the iniquity of my sin*, Psalm xxxii. 5. But this is not all that is to be said for the necessity of confession, as we have explained it: for, in the second place,

2. As no man is qualified for the mercy of God that doth not devoutly confess his sins, (because not to confess is an argument that the man doth not truly repent,) so, if we do consider what is imported in confession, we shall be convinced that it is a thing that in the very nature of it must needs, above all other things we can do, recommend us to God; for it is doing what right we possibly can to the several attributes of God to which we have done dishonour. If God had never commanded this expression of re-

penitance, yet we should easily have gathered from the reason of the thing that it is the best, the most natural compensation we can make to God for the breach of his laws. Not that in true speaking there is any compensation, any satisfaction to be made by us to God ; Christ, by his sacrifice on the cross, hath done that for us ; and that satisfaction that he made we humbly tender to God on our behalf, and pretend to no other. But this nevertheless we may say, that by approaching to God with an hearty sense of our sins, and confessing them before him with truly contrite and penitent hearts, we make the best reparation we are capable of for the affronts and injuries which by our sins we have done to any of his attributes. By thus accusing and condemning ourselves, we do right to God's sovereignty and absolute power by acknowledging him to have both a right and an ability to punish us : we do right likewise to his goodness, since we acknowledge that we have acted vilely and unworthily, and against our own interests, in transgressing his laws, which we cannot but be sensible are infinitely reasonable and good, and much for our advantage to observe. To his omnipresence and omniscience also we make some satisfaction, since our confession of our faults supposeth that we have a sense that God knows and taketh notice of all our actions. In a word, by hearty and penitent confession of our sins we both justify God and give glory to him : we may say both these things because we have warrant from scripture for them. David, in the 51st Ps. ver. 4. therefore makes a confession of his sins to God, *that God might be justified in his sentence, and clear when he is judged.* And when Joshua exhorts Achan to confess his sin, though yet it

was well enough known already in the congregation, the argument he useth to persuade him was, that this confession was for the glory of God: *My son, says he, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him*, Josh. vii. 19.

This that I have said is abundantly sufficient to shew what great reason there is that confession of sins should be made so indispensable a condition of the forgiveness of them.

I might add several other considerations, drawn from the great benefits and advantages that we ourselves do receive by the practice of it; as, for instance, the great peace and comfort and satisfaction that it must needs yield to an afflicted, troubled mind, thus to have disburdened itself of all its loads and encumbrances: (as certainly, to a sensible spirit, the conscience of sin is of all others the greatest burden :) so that upon this account God's obliging us to the confession of our sins is the greatest mercy to us that can be. I might also add another consideration, viz. the mighty obligation that this practice of confession doth lay upon all of us to forsake the sins we do thus confess. Such an obligation, that really we must be impudent if we can always confess, and yet always return to the same sins again. So that upon this account it must be acknowledged that it is as much for our good as for the reasonableness of the thing, that confession of sins is made so necessary a part of repentance.

But I shall wave these things, and proceed (by way of application of what has been said) to say something of the manner in which we are to confess our sins, and to give a few directions about it.

The great business that we have to take care of

in the exercise of this part of repentance is, that we do deeply affect ourselves with a sense of the great evil of sin, and the affront it puts upon the divine Majesty; as also with a sense of the infinite obligations we are under to obey all the laws of God, both upon the account that they are so just and reasonable in themselves, and likewise upon account that God, by so many instances of kindness to us, (as every one of us, if we would reflect, can give thousands of instances to ourselves,) hath laid such powerful and irresistible engagements upon us to live up to a conformity to them.

1. If now we be affected with a sense of these things as we ought to be, we shall in the first place, whenever we approach to God to confess our sins, express a hearty sorrow for having offended so good, so kind, so gracious a God, so continual a Benefactor: for having transgressed such righteous, such unexceptionable laws, which were given us purely for our benefit; and which we can never transgress but we act against ourselves and our own interests. We shall blush at our extreme ingratitude to God, and see our own folly in so unaccountably departing from him in any instances; and at the same time we have these thoughts, we shall seriously resolve to be wiser for the future, and accordingly we shall anew dedicate and devote ourselves to the service of God our creator, and Jesus Christ our redeemer, renewing our vows and purposes that we have so often made to him, in a faithful endeavour, in all our thoughts and words and deeds, to govern ourselves by the laws he hath prescribed us. All this is implied in the notion of religious confession, as I have before explained it, and is indeed the very life and soul of it.

2. But then, secondly, the more particular our confession is, the better it is, and the more acceptable it will be: not upon account that God ever needs to be informed of what faults we are guilty, or takes any delight in the rehearsal of a long catalogue of sins; but because this particular confession is an argument and an expression of the sincerity of our repentance, and shews that we have searched and examined our hearts to the bottom, and that we harbour no concealed affection to any particular sin whatsoever, but that we are willing *to bring out every enemy* that speaks opposition to God and his laws, *to be slain before him*.

3. But, thirdly, he that confesseth as he should do will be sure not to favour himself in his confession; he will not be forward to make excuses or apologies for his sins: he will not say that the faults he hath been guilty of are either little in their own nature, or brought upon him by such temptations as he could not avoid. On the contrary, he will rather aggravate his faults, and lay a load upon himself, that God may lay the less load upon him. He will acknowledge himself to be a base, vile, unworthy creature, unfaithful to his vows and solemn purposes, and ungrateful to his God, who is every day heaping obligations upon him. He will remember all the engagements God hath laid upon him, and that he hath laid upon himself, to a strict life of virtue and holiness. He will bitterly censure his own folly and unaccountable extravagance, that he hath in any instance departed from those rules: in a word, the aggravating circumstances which he can in his own mind apply to his sins will so affect him, that he shall become vile and mean in his own

eyes; so unworthy a thing, that he will from the bottom of his heart profess to God that he is not *worthy the least of his mercies*. And certainly this is the confession that is acceptable to God; this is the *judging of ourselves* that the apostle speaks of, 1 Cor. xi. 31. by which we prevent *our being judged of the Lord*. And, lastly, this is that oblation which David speaks of, Psalm li. 17. *of a broken and contrite heart*, which, he says, *God will not despise*.

4. But, fourthly, it is also to be remembered, that the quicker and speedier our confession is after the commission of any sin, the more virtue it hath in it, and the more easily it obtains a pardon. When it is our unhappiness at any time to commit a fault, it is the worst course we can take to lie under that fault. When the sin is newly done, our conscience (unless we be very bad) doth not fail to charge it home upon us, and we are then deeply sensible of it; and if we go immediately to God Almighty to unburden ourselves of the load it lays upon us, we shall do it very affectionately, and with truly broken and contrite hearts; whereas if we let the matter rest as it is, and do not presently make our peace with God by humble confession and begging pardon, our hearts in a little time will grow much harder, we shall lose all that pungent sense we first had of our sin, and it will be a difficult matter afterwards to retrieve it. Besides, it is a hundred to one, if we delay the present time, but the sin gets ground upon us. By not having made confession of it, and renewed our resolutions, (which is the setting ourselves in the same state we were before,) the next temptation to that or any other sin

will the easier find access to us, and prevail upon us. We have by that sin disarmed ourselves; we have slackened our guard, and are more obnoxious either to the same or any other enemy that will make assault upon us.

If we design therefore to live virtuously and religiously, whenever we are overtaken in a sin, let us presently repent of it, and beg pardon for it, and reinforce our good purposes. By this means the greatest crime we can commit will not do us any great mischief. But if we let things alone, and defer our reconciliation with God, even a little sin may prove dangerous and of fatal consequence. It is in this case as it is with the wounds of the body: a grievous wound, presently taken care of, will find an easy cure; but if through our negligence we let it rankle and ulcerate, it proves oftentimes hard enough for the skill of an able surgeon.

Upon this account I cannot but earnestly recommend to you the rule that is so often mentioned in our books of devotion, viz. that every night before you sleep, you would take an account of the actions of the day past; that you would examine your consciences what has been done well that day, and what hath been done amiss; and for the former to return hearty thanks to God; but what you find of the latter, not to sleep till you have confessed it to God, and begged his pardon for it. If we would be thus punctual as to our repentance and confession, it would be in a manner impossible for us to miscarry at the long run.

5. But, lastly, to conclude, there is another advice that we should do very well to put in practice in this business of confessing our sins; viz. that besides

our daily confessions and those others that we may have occasion for, we should appoint to ourselves some stated times, (and those as frequent as our affairs will give us leave,) for the more solemn performance of this duty. Why should we not once or twice in a month set apart some hour or hours in a day for this business; that is, to take an account of our own actions, to examine the state of our souls, to see how we are gone forward or backward in the great work we have to do, and to adjust accounts between God and us. Nobody but those that have tried it will easily conceive the benefits that we shall reap by this exercise. It is certainly the greatest preservative of our virtue and good estate towards God that can be. And it is likewise the surest way to set us right, if we have gone astray; especially if to this exercise we add the renewing our vows by partaking in the holy sacrament.

In a word, let us all repent earnestly of our sins, and return to the Lord with all our hearts, confessing our own vileness and wickedness before him, and taking up most serious and steadfast resolutions to serve him faithfully for the time to come in newness of life. Then will God accept us and pardon us, and give us such a measure of strength and assistance, that we shall both walk acceptably before him in this world, and shall likewise be made partakers of his eternal glory in the other.

A DISCOURSE

ON

MARK XVI. 16.

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

OUR Saviour having, by his life, and his preaching, and his miracles, and his resurrection from the dead, laid a sufficient ground and foundation for the ready belief and entertainment of his gospel among mankind, comes upon his ascension into heaven, and as the last act he had to do upon earth, to issue out his royal charter and commission to his apostles, to go and preach this gospel all the world over; and this he does in these words, *Go ye, saith he, into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* St. Matthew hath set it down a little more largely; *Go ye and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.* This was the apostles' commission; this was the great trust committed to them, and in them to all succeeding ministers of Christ to the world's end.

But now, lest it should be surmised that this order might signify very little, since here was no enforcement of it, no obligation laid upon the people to whom they were to preach, to receive their message, our Saviour takes care to remove that pretence by

adding these words following: (which are the words I am now to discourse of:) *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.* Here is an obligation with a witness upon all persons whatsoever, to whom the gospel is preached, to receive and embrace it, since no less than their everlasting salvation or damnation depends upon it.

That which I design at present upon this text is, to make some observations and reflections upon it, partly in order to the clearing the sense of it, and partly by way of inference from it.

Our Saviour here orders his apostles to *go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*, declaring, that *whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved; and whosoever believeth not shall be damned.*

The first thing I beg leave to observe from hence is, that since men to the world's end are to be saved by believing the gospel, then there is a necessity that there should be always an order of men in the world whose business it should be to preach this gospel. For, as St. Paul truly argues, *how shall men believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?* If Christ designed that the belief of his gospel should be the way of salvation as long as the world lasts, he must certainly have designed that there should be men set apart to preach and make known this gospel as long as the world lasts likewise. Accordingly we find that he hath *de facto* done so; for the commission he gave to his apostles he did really mean should extend to all those that should succeed them

in that ministry, as appears plainly in the last clause of it, as I read it to you out of St. Matthew ; *Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.* What is the meaning of that ? Would he be with the apostles to the end of the world ? Why, that could not be ; they were to go off the stage in a few years ; and so they did : but the world hath continued many ages after their death, and is yet like to continue. Christ's meaning then could be no other than this, that he would not only by his Spirit assist the apostles in the preaching of the gospel during their lives, but he would also continue that assistance to those that should succeed them in the work of the ministry, even as long as the world should endure ; and accordingly we see that he hath hitherto made this promise good, having for above 1600 years all along continued a succession of Christ's ministers to gain souls to Christ, and all along likewise continued a succession of Christ's people in all parts of the world, who are gained to Christ by their ministry ; and as he hath hitherto made good his promise, so we doubt not but he will continue to do it to the end of the world.

We beg therefore of all people, that they would not think it strange that at this day they see a sort of men (you may call them by what contemptible names you please) that are so zealous for this business of Christ Jesus and his gospel, making it their set work to be talking of it once a week ; nay, and now and then being so plain with you, as to tell you that it is upon the peril of your salvation if you do not give ear to their message. The men may be contemptible enough ; but yet the errand they come upon is not contemptible. How untowardly, how

ungraceful, how unacceptable soever they may be as to their other circumstances, yet, if they preach nothing but the gospel of Christ, you are bound to listen to it, nay, you are miserable if you do not. And as for those that do embrace it, it is no less a valuable treasure to them for being had from earthen vessels. Let it not therefore be objected to us, when we preach Christ Jesus to you, that it is our trade; we must talk at this rate, for we get our living by it; alas! it is but small comfort to get a livelihood by other people's credulity; I think an honest, serious man would rather starve than live by cheating. If there be any atheists or infidels among the clergy, any that, whilst they preach Christ Jesus to the people, believe no better of him and his religion than as a mere fable, (as they say pope Leo the Tenth did not,) they are certainly the worst of men, and the greatest impostors that the world can shew; and let them be treated as such, no man will be sorry for it. But when we heartily believe in Jesus Christ and his religion, and are really persuaded that neither we nor you can be saved without it, and likewise are called by the authority of God and man to the public preaching of it, we think it very hard we should be the less credited because it is the profession we live by. If our Saviour's words be true, *Whosoever believeth shall be saved; but whosoever believeth not shall be damned*; it is certainly more your interest than ours that you should all be such believers as we would have you. But let that be as it will, we shall have a sad account to make, if, being ministers of the gospel, we suffer you to perish for want of telling you of these things; or, if we cannot tell you any thing but what you knew before, at

least for want of calling upon you to put in practice what you know. Time was, when the preaching of the gospel was so far from being encouraged by the state, that to be a public minister was the ready way to martyrdom ; yet in those days there were as many preachers, in proportion to the number of the hearers, as there are now : nay, and their saying then was, *Væ mihi si non evangelizavero*, “ Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel ! ” I hope such times will never come again ; and I hope none among us wish for them : but if they should come, I doubt not but God would raise up those that would still preach the gospel, and would declare, even at the peril of their lives, that *whosoever believeth shall be saved ; but whosoever believeth not shall be damned*.

The second thing I observe from these words is this, that our Saviour here so puts his proposition, as to make baptism as necessary a condition of salvation as believing ; for he doth not say, *Whosoever believeth shall be saved*, but thus, *Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved* : he joins them both together. What are we to learn from hence ? that Jesus Christ has laid as great a stress upon an outward ceremony, as he hath done upon an inward virtue ? No, by no means : but this ; that the belief of Christianity, without taking the profession of it upon us, and obliging ourselves to live according to it, is not sufficient. A man will perhaps tell you that he believes the history of our Saviour to be a true history, and that he hath a great esteem for his person, and looks upon his doctrine as the most excellent and useful and divine morality that was ever delivered to the world. Why now this

seems a pretty fair account of the man's religion in comparison of what we can have from others. The gentleman that makes this confession of his faith is civil to our Lord Jesus Christ. But yet this extremely falls short of what one must do that means to have any benefit by our Saviour. How great a respect soever a man pretends to have for the gospel, yet if he do not take the profession of it upon him, that is to say, if he do not enter himself into the number of Christ's disciples by baptism, vowing all obedience to Christ Jesus as his Lord and Master, and owning his religion upon all occasions, and communicating in his worship and service, we cannot say that he is a Christian, though he may be a well-wisher to Christianity.

Examine the scriptures, and see what it was that made one to be a Jew, or an Israelite, in the old time; was it enough to think honourably of the law of Moses? No; but a man must become circumcised, and oblige himself to live according to that law. The case is just the same as to our Christianity: I will speak the thing as plainly as I can; and in what I shall say you will have a full account of the meaning of the words of my text. The business of our Lord Jesus, as our Redeemer, was to mediate or procure a new covenant between God and man, and to seal it with his blood. God's part in this covenant was this; he was to grant unto all those that entered into this covenant the forgiveness of their sins, and the grace and assistance of his holy Spirit, for the enabling them to live a holy life; and, lastly, an eternal inheritance in the kingdom of God: this was God's part. The condition of this covenant on man's part was this; that all they

who expect to partake of those benefits should believe in Jesus Christ, and own him for their Saviour, and assent to all his doctrines, and endeavour to frame their lives according to those rules he hath prescribed them. This is that gracious, that happy covenant which God established with mankind through the mediation of our Lord Jesus. Well, now here is a covenant made, an everlasting covenant between God and man, sealed with the blood of the Son of God. All mankind that will be eternally happy are to be entered into this covenant; actually and particularly entered, not the father for the children, but every one for himself, as it was in the covenant of circumcision. But how is that to be done? Why, our Saviour himself hath taken care to order and prescribe the way of it; *Go*, saith he, *disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*. Baptism then is the way which he hath appointed for the entering into this covenant; and great reason there was for it. Our Saviour found, when he came into the world, that his countrymen the Jews had used that ceremony of baptism many ages, for the admission of proselytes into the true religion. He, therefore, that came to take all nations and people and languages into his covenant, laid hold of that ceremony, which he already found to his hands used for that purpose, and applies it to his own institution, ordering all persons from henceforward to enter into his covenant by baptism.

But what then? Was there no more required to the making men partakers of the benefits of this new covenant, but only to be baptized into it? I answer, No more, if we truly understand the import-

ance of baptism ; but a great deal more, if you take baptism only for the washing or sprinkling with water. St. Peter, in his First Epistle, chap. iii. ver. 12. tells us expressly, that *baptism saves us* ; and by telling us that, he saith as much as our Saviour here saith, that *whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved*. But then, that he might not be misunderstood, he immediately explains himself, *not*, saith he, *the washing away the filth of the flesh* ; it is not that baptism which saveth us, *but the answer of a good conscience towards God* ; that is to say, the solemn answers that were made by those that took the vow of baptism on them to the interrogatories that were then put to them concerning the forsaking the Devil and his works, and owning Christ Jesus and his religion, and walking according to the holy laws he delivered. It was the performing these answers with a good conscience that would save men effectually in the day of the Lord Jesus. The outward ceremony of washing with water would signify little, but that with the things signified by it, that is, a holy and a pure life, suitable to the Christian faith, that would be effectual for the salvation of all men.

To apply now all this to our business :

When our Saviour saith, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*, his meaning is this, that the bare assent to his doctrine is not enough to give a man a title to that salvation which he hath purchased and promised : but there is a necessity of entering into that covenant which he procured of God for mankind by his death. The outward ceremony of entering into that covenant is outward baptism, and therefore all Christians must be baptized. But

the main thing intended in that covenant, and signified by that baptism, is a hearty owning of Jesus Christ, and a holy and pure and innocent life, conformable to the doctrines of the gospel. Whosoever thus believes in Jesus Christ, and is thus in covenant with God, and thus endeavours to perform those conditions which by that covenant are on his part required, every such man shall be saved. But whosoever continues an infidel or unbeliever upon the preaching of the gospel, every such man shall be damned. This, as I take it, is the full importance of our Saviour's words in my text.

The third thing I observe from hence is this; that the baptism of water, as appointed by our Saviour, was not a temporary institution, a ceremony just to last for that age; but it was designed by our Saviour to continue in use among his disciples as long as he had a church upon earth. The reason of it is plain, because this was the method he appointed for the admitting men into his covenant and into his church. If therefore all particular persons from age to age are to believe in Christ, and to be entered into his covenant, and made members of his church; then all particular persons are to be baptized with water *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*. If now this be so, what must we say of some religious sects among us that are so very spiritual, that they will have nothing to do with such a carnal ceremony as that of baptism with water is; either pretending that the whole thing is meant in a mystical sense, or that it is long ago antiquated? Thus do the Quakers and some other sectaries.

These people call themselves Christians, for they pretend to believe in Jesus Christ. But do they

really deserve that name, when they were never entered into covenant with him? But, however, to speak the softliest of them; if they be Christians, sure they are far from being right sound Christians, because they live in a constant transgression of as plain a precept of Jesus Christ as any in the gospel; and such a precept too as all the Christians in the world, till this last age, have always made a conscience of religiously observing.

The fourth thing I remark upon this text is this; that from these words we may be fairly led into an easy method of giving ourselves satisfaction concerning a question that hath made not a little stir and bustle in the world; not that there is much difficulty in the thing, but that men, by endeavouring to serve parties and factions, have industriously made it difficult. The question I mean is, What is the true notion of the catholic church out of which there is no salvation? All Christians are agreed that Jesus Christ did found a church while he was upon earth that should continue to the end of the world, and against which *the gates of hell should never prevail*. All Christians likewise are agreed that this church is but one, however it may be spread into never so many countries; and this is that which we acknowledge in our Creed, when we say, “I believe “one catholic and apostolic church.” Lastly, it is likewise agreed by all Christians, that out of this one church there is no salvation, at least no salvation promised by God or covenanted for by our Lord Jesus Christ. But now here comes the question, Where is this true church to be found, since there are so many different and opposite churches in the world, all pretending to be the true church, but no-

toriously contradicting one another both in doctrine and worship? Why now, methinks, we have a plain answer to this question from my text, and that is this; wherever the gospel of Christ is preached, and men do believe it, and are baptized into it, there is a true church: in all those places all the world over where this is made good, in all those places the true church of Christ is; and every one of those combinations of men so preaching, so believing, and so professing, are true parts and members of the catholic church, (that mystical body of Christ,) out of which there is no salvation. We do not say that they are all equally pure, or that a man may communicate with all of them with equal safety: but that they are all true parts of the catholic church, though some more sound, and others more corrupt. This, you will say, is a very plain, intelligible notion of the catholic church: but how do we prove it? Why, we can prove it undeniably, beyond all contradiction, from the very words of my text. It is owned and confessed, that none out of the catholic church can be saved: but our Saviour here declares, that *whosoever believes and is baptized* is put into a capacity of salvation. It therefore follows undeniably, that *whosoever believeth and is baptized* is within the catholic church. I do ask, Is it true, that *whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved*, or is it not? If it be not, then we cannot rely upon our Saviour's words, who yet is the author of our faith. If it be true, then every such person is a member of the catholic church; otherwise people may be saved without being in the church.

So that you see in this present divided state of

Christendom, where there are so many different communions, if a man be unsatisfied which of them he should choose to venture his soul in; the question he is to put to himself is not this, Which of these communions is the true catholic church, in opposition to all the rest? as the papists put it; for none of them are so, though perhaps they are all parts or members of that catholic church: but this; In which of those communions that he hath any knowledge of is the gospel of Christ most purely taught and professed according to the primitive rules of it, and consequently which of them he may with the greatest safety join himself to? Now if this be the question, as it certainly is, a serious inquirer may without very much pains give himself satisfaction.

The fifth reflection I make upon these words is this; we may from hence be able to give a true account of the measure and standard of that faith which is required of Christians in order to their salvation.

All Christians agree that we must be believers: but some, taking advantage of this, will not allow us to have a right faith, or to be orthodox Christians, unless we can come up to all those notions and propositions which they esteem articles of faith. One would think, therefore, that some rule ought to be given us by which we might measure the sufficiency of our faith, or by which we might know when we have believed all that is necessary; that so we might not be under the tyranny of such usurpers upon our consciences as would be always imposing on our faith, till at last they came to make us swallow impossibilities for divine revelation: and such a

rule, methinks, our Saviour hath here given us. His commission to the apostles is, *Go into all the world, and preach the gospel unto every creature*; and he adds, *Whosoever believeth shall be saved. Believeth!* believeth what? Why certainly the gospel that he spoke of before: *Whosoever believeth the gospel and is baptized shall be saved*; that must be his meaning. It is the gospel therefore that we must believe; and to the believing of that alone, without any more, the promises of salvation are made. But what is this gospel? Why, it is plainly that doctrine which Jesus Christ himself taught, and which the apostles from him preached to the world, and which was all in their times put into writing, and which is all fully contained in those books that we have at this day in our hands, which we call the New Testament. This gospel then is the rule of our faith. Every doctrine that is there delivered we must believe; but as for any doctrine that is not there delivered, nor can be deduced from thence, we are not bound to believe that as an article of faith, let it come never so well recommended by the authority of popes or their councils, nay, or backed with the credit of miracles wrought for the attestation of it. This, I say, is our rule of faith; that rule which our church prescribes to us as well as the holy scriptures; and blessed be God we do so strictly keep to it. So long as we do so, it is impossible but we must be not only a true church, but also a right and a sound church. We cannot indeed, upon those principles, admit of abundance of points, which our neighbours lay so much weight upon as to make all those that deny them to be infidels and heretics. We do not believe the infallibility of the church, nor

the supremacy of the church of Rome, nor transubstantiation, nor purgatory, nor invocation of saints, nor twenty other such articles, which they make necessary to salvation. And the reason is, because we find none of those things in the gospel, as it is contained in the holy scriptures, which we are sure would have been there, if God had made it our duty to have believed them. But we believe all that the gospel teacheth, and make use likewise of all the means that are possible to understand it in its true sense: and this we are sure is all that Christ hath required of us as to the business of believing.

But, sixthly, another reflection I make upon this text is this; that this proposition of our Saviour's, *Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved; and whosoever believeth not shall be damned*, doth only respect those people to whom the gospel of Christ is preached, but not others to whom it is not preached. This will appear by the connexion of these words with the former, *Go*, saith our Saviour, *into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*; and then he immediately subjoins, *Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but whosoever believeth not shall be damned*. How is that? Shall every one be damned that believeth not, though they never heard the gospel. No, that cannot be inferred from these words, but only this; those that upon the preaching of the gospel do embrace it, and enter into the new covenant it tenders to them, those shall be saved; but those that upon the preaching of the gospel to them do not embrace it, all such shall be damned. But here is not a word said of those that never had the gospel preached to them, either as to their salvation or damnation. The infer-

ence I draw from hence is this ; that those promises of salvation, and those threatenings of damnation, which are made in the gospel, do only concern those that have the gospel preached to them, and that have means and opportunities afforded them for the closing with the one, and avoiding the other. But what then is to become of those people that never had these means and opportunities put into their hands ? Are they to be saved, or are they to be damned ? I answer, We can say nothing to their case, but must refer them to God. To pronounce positively of their salvation we have no warrant, because the promises of salvation, as the gospel declares them to us, (and we have no promises of salvation but in the gospel,) are only made to those that believe in Jesus Christ, and enter into his covenant by baptism. On the other side, to pronounce of their damnation seems very harsh and uncharitable; nor do I know that any in the scripture are threatened with damnation but such as reject the gospel after it is preached to them, or dishonour their profession after they have embraced it, by a wicked unholy life ; neither of which can be said of those we are now speaking of. We ought therefore, as I said, to determine nothing about them either way, but to leave them to the uncovenanted mercies of God, if I may so speak. For what have we to do to judge another man's servant, as St. Paul expresseth it : they are God's servants, and to him their Master they stand or fall ; and if it pleaseth him, he is able to make them stand. This we are certain of, that *the Judge of all the world will do right*. Nor will he demand the tale of bricks where he hath allowed no straw to make them. And this we are likewise certain of, that when the great

day of retribution shall come, the day when all accounts shall be cast up, and rewards and punishments distributed to every one according to their works, God Almighty will then vindicate not only his justice and his truth, but his goodness and his mercy also, to the satisfaction of all the world; and a thousand ways he may have of adjusting those matters, and such like intricate points, which we now cannot conceive.

But, in the seventh place, the last reflection I make upon these words is this; that what is here promised to all Christians in my text, and what is here denounced against all unbelievers, was designed by our Saviour to extend to all ages of the world. As those that then believed and were baptized upon the apostles' preaching were put into a condition of salvation, so are all people put into the same condition that at this day among us do enter themselves into the Christian covenant. And as those that continued infidels and unbelievers when the gospel was preached to them then were doomed to damnation, so shall it fare likewise with all those that nowadays deny or reject that gospel that is taught among us. There is the same necessity of believing in Christ now that there was then; and there is the same guilt and punishment of refusing him; *for there is no other name under heaven given unto man, either then or now, by which we can be saved.* There is indeed this difference between the persons that were preached to then and those that are preached to now; that in those days people first believed, and afterwards were baptized; but now (as it must be in countries where Christianity is the national religion) people are first baptized and after-

wards they believe; or, to speak a sad truth, some of them afterwards do not believe. But let not any think that their baptism without faith in Christ, and owning their relation to him in all the instances that he hath commanded, will signify any thing: notwithstanding their baptism, we still declare, and we have authority so to do, that *whosoever believeth not the gospel shall be damned*.

I would to God all men, that go by the name of Christians among us, but yet in their hearts do not own Christ for their Lord and Master, would seriously consider this. They have put on Christ's livery, as I may speak, for they are baptized, and they call themselves by his name, and they do not refuse to be present where his worship is celebrated, and sometimes where his sacraments are administered, especially when they have a turn to serve; but yet, if there be any regard to be given to what passes in their conversation, and that in such humours too, when one would be apt to think they must speak their minds, they have no more true belief of Christianity, nor real veneration for Jesus Christ and his gospel, than they have for Mahomet and his Alcoran. It is a melancholy consideration that there should be any such men in a Christian country, especially in such a country as ours, where the gospel is taught in its native truth and simplicity, without those mixtures of foppery which in other countries might alienate the minds of sagacious persons from it. But it is the pleasure of God that his religion and his church should always be exercised by enemies from one quarter or other. When superstition on one hand, and enthusiasm on the other, could not, after their utmost efforts, do us any mischief, lo!

atheism and infidelity start up, and seem to threaten us with ruin. But this is our comfort, that as the principles that lead to those things are impious and hated of God, so we are sure they can never serve any interests of man; but, on the contrary, are the most destructive to human society of any thing in the world: and therefore we cannot doubt but the government will do all that is possible for the discouraging and putting out of countenance all this sort of principles. And that very thing alone, with this kind of people, will do more toward the effectual suppressing of them, than all the arguments in the world.

But in the mean time they call for arguments from us; and God forbid we should refuse them. They plead that it is against all reason and justice that a man should be damned for that which he cannot help: our text here saith, that *whosoever believeth not the gospel shall be damned*. They answer to this, “that they would believe the gospel if “they could, but they cannot;” and they urge that a man cannot believe more than he hath evidence for; for it is no more in our power to believe what we have a mind to, than it is to *add a cubit to our stature* if we had a mind to be taller; and therefore, say they, what sense is there in saying that a man shall be damned for not believing the gospel, when it is not in his power to believe it if he would?

This is the greatest objection that is made against our text. I beg therefore your leave to give an answer to it, and then I have done. And here we do readily allow them all that they ask: we grant that a man cannot believe what he will, any more than he can love or hate what he knows nothing of.

When any thing is proposed to a man's belief, his understanding must first be convinced of the truth of it before he can believe it. The thing must either be plain to him at the first sight, or it must be proved by deduction from plain principles that he doth already acknowledge; or, lastly, he must believe it upon the credit or authority of the person that proposeth it to him, who is such a one as he hath reason to think cannot or will not impose upon him: in a word, every one who believes a thing must have some reason, or at least must think he hath some reason, for the belief of it.

But then, after we have granted all this, it must likewise be acknowledged on the other hand, that there are a great many things which a man cannot or doth not believe, though there be reason and evidence enough to be given for the truth of them: as for instance; I dare say you will all allow that there is reason and evidence enough to be given that there is but one eternal God, the maker of heaven and earth, and that the sun and moon and stars are no gods, but only the creatures of God; and yet it is certain that there hath been and are people in the world that worship these creatures as eternal gods. Again, I say, you think there is proof enough to be given that the bread and wine in the sacrament do continue in their natures, and are truly bread and wine even after the words of consecration have been pronounced upon them; and yet you know there are a great many Christians in the world that are so far from being of this belief, as to take them for the very real body and blood of Christ. You see then, that as a man cannot believe without reason, so he may still continue an unbeliever, though there

be all the reason in the world that he should believe.

Well, what do we gather from hence? Why, we gather from hence a plain solution of this difficulty that is before us; and that is this:

We do not pretend that a man shall be called to an account by God for not believing a thing when there was no reason to believe it; nay, neither do we say that a man shall be called to account for not believing every thing, though yet he had the greatest reason in the world to believe it. For it may so happen (as it doth every day in a thousand cases) that a thing may be true, and a man, if he will inquire, may have proof beyond all contradiction for the truth of it; and yet it shall be of no ill consequence to him whether he believes it or no, because it was not his business, nor his interest, nor his duty, to take pains to inform himself right about it. But this is that which we say: in a matter where it is a man's greatest business and greatest interest and greatest duty to inform himself aright, and to believe aright, and in a matter likewise where there are sufficient means and opportunities afforded to every one for the gaining a right information, and having a right belief; and, lastly, in a matter where there is so much evidence and proof of the thing, that every one would believe if he did all that either an honest or a wise man would think himself obliged to in these circumstances: I say, wherever this is the case, (as we say this is the case among us,) it is nonsense and madness for any man to plead that it is not in his power to believe, and therefore he thinks it unjust he should be called to account by God for not believing. Here therefore is

the issue we put the point upon : We do not pretend that any man shall be damned for not believing what it was not in his power to believe ; but we say, If it is through your own fault that you do not believe, or if the case be such that if you had been sincere, honest, virtuous men, you would have believed ; then your unbelief is the effect of vice and wickedness, and is a plain piece of immorality, and you are accountable for it as you are for adultery or murder, or any such wilful crimes.

And therefore, to conclude : I do here, by way of application, earnestly address myself to all those among us that are in their hearts unbelievers, however they do outwardly profess the Christian religion, and frequent our assemblies. I beg of you, in the name of God, to examine yourselves seriously concerning the grounds of your unbelief, and see whether you can satisfy your own consciences that you have done all that serious, prudent, unbiassed men would do in a matter of such importance as this is, wherein no less than your everlasting salvation or damnation is concerned. If your own consciences can testify to you that you have dealt honestly and impartially in this matter, and that yet, after all your endeavours, you cannot find reason enough to persuade you heartily to believe in Jesus Christ, I have nothing further to say to you ; let God judge this matter between him and you, as he certainly one day will : charity will oblige us to believe the best of you. And therefore, if this be your case, we cannot rank you otherwise than in the number of those heathens that do not believe the gospel because it was never fairly proposed to them.

But then, in the mean time that you make this

inquiry into your own state, be not too forward to deceive yourselves, nor to entertain a good opinion of yourselves upon a general and slight view of your own condition, but put such questions honestly and home to your consciences as any sincere man would do in such a matter as this.

As for instance :

Have you seriously and deliberately considered the Christian religion in all the parts of it? Have you acquainted yourselves with all the doctrines of it; how suitable they are to the natural notions that man has of God and religion, and how extremely they tend to the making mankind both wise and happy?

Have you examined the precepts of the gospel, and taken notice how much they excel the morality of the best philosophers, and how wonderfully they are contrived and accommodated to the uses and indigencies of all sorts of men, in whatever state and condition they be; and, in a word, how happy the world would be, if all men were hearty believers of these doctrines, and serious practisers of these precepts?

Have you seriously taken into your consideration the rich and invaluable promises that are in this religion made over to mankind, which no other religion can pretend to; such as the forgiveness of all our sins upon repentance, and assistance of God's grace to enable us to live holy and pure lives; and, lastly, an eternal, immortal life of glory and happiness in another world? Why, natural reason will teach us that all these things are worthy of God to promise, and that we want, extremely want, the assurance of these things, in order to the making us

good : and yet no other religion in the world hath assured us of them but the religion of our Lord Jesus.

Have you likewise impartially examined the evidence and proof that our Lord Jesus Christ gave for the truth of his being sent by God to teach all these things to the world, and the little or no objections that are to be made against it? Have you looked into the prophecies of the Old Testament, which for two thousand years together spoke of a Saviour to be sent to mankind, and taken notice how exactly they were fulfilled by our Saviour? Have you considered the person of our Lord Jesus, and his way of living, how innocent, how sincere, how pious, how charitable, how entirely devoted to God's service, how free from all suspicion of being a designing man, and how constant to the death in asserting his pretensions?

Have you thought of the prodigious miracles that he wrought all his life long for the confirmation of his doctrine; the voices of God from heaven to attest that he was the Son of God; his resurrection from the dead, and visible ascension into heaven? Which things are demonstrations to all mankind that believe a God and providence, that Jesus Christ was no other than he pretended to be, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world.

Lastly, have you considered that the same power and virtue that was in Christ for the doing all these wonderful things, was, as he promised, continued to his apostles, and to all the preachers of the gospel for many years afterwards, even till they had converted the world from idolatry to the belief of Christ Jesus; and that by no other ways nor methods but

by the excellency of their doctrine, and the holiness of their lives, and the wonderful miracles they performed, and their readiness at any time to lay down their lives for the cause of the Christian religion?

These are some of the things which you ought very well to consider before you can satisfy yourselves that you have reason to keep off from being Christians. But you will perhaps say, you have thought of all these things, but yet you are not convinced that you ought to embrace Christ's religion. Why, it is almost impossible. Sure you have not thought of them as you should do; sure you was biassed and prejudiced on the other side when you took these matters into your consideration. But that is not fair thinking: you ought to come to those matters wholly free and indifferent, at least as much as is possible. But pray say seriously, whether the objections and dissatisfactions which you have met with about the Christian religion be the result of your own thinking, and such as you naturally fall into; or you have rather learned them from the discourse of that lewd, debauched, hotheaded company that you have used to converse with. If so, there is no great reason you should insist upon them.

I pray be pleased to examine yourselves further. Are you really concerned for another world after this? and do you really desire and endeavour to approve yourselves to God as well as you can? If you do, then I am sure you will do all that natural religion will teach you about this matter. Though you do not believe in Christ, yet you will live very sober and virtuous lives, and you will heartily pray to God likewise to direct you in the way that is ac-

ceptable to him. Now do you do this? Do you every day address to the throne of grace for assistance and direction? and do you hate every thing that is apparently evil, and make it your business to be as pious and charitable and sober as is possible? Why, whether you believe in Christ or no, these are the dictates of natural religion; and you must thus frame your life, otherwise you are not qualified for any direction or assistance from God Almighty. And if any man among us do thus frame his life, I shall think it very strange if such a man be not a hearty Christian: sure I am, I never yet heard or read of any instance to the contrary.

The truth of it is, men that are of this temper, men that are thus honestly disposed, never fail to believe in Christ at last, though at the beginning they do not. All such shall come unto Christ, because the Father draweth them: all such, because they endeavour to do God's will, shall know of Christ's doctrine, that it is of God. All this our Saviour hath long before told us.

But here is our case:

It is not the virtuous, the good, the humble, the modest, the charitable, the piously-disposed souls that disbelieve Christianity among us, but another sort of men: and I pray God the great reason of their unbelief be not this, that the doctrines of the gospel do not suit with those principles of liberty which they have espoused, nor with that course of life they are engaged in: and therefore since the gospel is against them, they will be against the gospel. But woe be to all such, for they are of all mortals in the most hopeless condition.

“ I pray God convert them from the evil of their

“ ways, that they may understand the things that
“ belong to their peace before they be hid from their
“ eyes.” And we ought all to join in this prayer,
not only for their sakes, but for the public: for athe-
ism and irreligion are infinitely mischievous to the
kingdom, as well as to those particular persons who
maintain and promote them. And I pray God that
all of us who do heartily embrace and believe the
Christian religion, may frame our lives and conver-
sation suitably to it, that so we may be no dispa-
ragement to our holy faith, but may rather *adorn*
the doctrine of God we do profess *in all things*.
This is the true way to obtain happy, peaceful days
in this world, and the way likewise that will infal-
libly bring us safe to the kingdom of heaven after
this world is ended. May God Almighty grant us
both these blessings for the sake of his dear Son our
Lord Jesus; To whom, &c.

A DISCOURSE

ON

ROMANS XII. 2.

Be not conformed to this world.

THE whole verse is this: *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God*; that is, ye that call yourselves Christians must not follow the ways of the men of this world, nor frame your conversation according to the evil customs you see before you; but you are to look upon yourselves as men of another world: your minds are to be formed and acted with new spiritual principles, that so ye may both approve and practise what the gospel of Christ requires of you, which is that good and acceptable and perfect law by which God would have you to frame your lives.

This point of not conforming to the world is so essential to Christianity, that it is one of those things which we all vow in our baptism: for as we then promise to renounce the Devil and all his works, so do we also promise to renounce the pomps and vanities of this world; and therefore, as there is the greatest obligation that is possible laid upon us to practise this duty, so it is of mighty concernment to us that we do well understand it, otherwise we shall bring endless scruples and difficulties upon ourselves. For to think of living in this world, and

not in many things conforming to it, or complying with the customs of it, will seem even to the best of men an hard, if not impossible task ; and consequently, if the bounds and limits of this precept be not well understood, we must unavoidably be entangled in many perplexities.

To fix these bounds therefore shall be my endeavour in the ensuing Discourse ; and in order hereunto I shall do these four things :

I. First of all I shall shew what kind of conformity to the world is allowable to Christians.

II. What kind of conformity to the world is here forbidden.

III. I shall name some particular instances in which this precept of not conforming to the world doth more especially seem to concern us at this day.

IV. I shall give account by what rules and measures we are to guide ourselves in this point of conformity to the world, that what is lawful in itself may not be unlawful or sinful in us.

I. I begin with the first of these points, that is, to shew what kind of conformity to this world is allowable to Christians ; and what I have to say upon this head I shall comprise in two propositions :

1st, First of all ; no man is bound to differ from the world merely for difference sake.

2dly, That it is not only lawful, but expedient, that in things which are not by the law of God forbidden, we should frame our conversation according to the course of the world.

1st, No man is bound to differ from the world in his way of living merely for difference sake.

My meaning is this : No man is obliged to forbear or abstain from the practice or use of any thing

merely upon this account, that it is a thing that the world, or, if you will, the wicked men of the world, do practise or use.

This proposition I lay down to obviate the pretences of some enthusiastical men among us, a main article of whose religion is, to be at as wide a distance from the world in their way of living as possibly they can be; for, say they, *the whole world lieth in wickedness*, and all the people of God are to come out of it; no further to comply with the manners and customs of it than what absolute necessity doth require, for all further compliances savour of the wisdom of this world, which is carnal and sensual and devilish: and so far have they run this point, that it is accounted unlawful to use the same language or speech that is commonly used in the world, but every thing is to be spoken, so far as may be, in the scripture language. And as much do they declaim against the common ways of behaviour and deportment that are practised among men. All that expression of duty to our superiors, and of civility and respect to others, which is according to the mode of the country, whether it be by uncovering the head, or bowing the knee, or by giving them their just and usual titles, or by saluting them in the common form of ceremony and address; all this is exploded as an unchristian thing. And the same war do they declare against the habits and garments of the world that they do against its language and behaviour. Whosoever gives up his name to the profession of religion must mortify himself as to all gayety of attire, and even decency too; he must strip himself of every thing that is rich or ornamental about him, and must wear nothing that is super-

fluous, nothing by which his rank and quality may be distinguished from that of others.

This is the principle which one whole sect has espoused, and which a great many who have not wholly given up themselves to that sect are yet unsatisfied about. But to shew the extreme absurdity of it, there needs nothing more to be done than only to name these following things: for to insist largely on them in so plain a case would be only to misspend time.

(1.) First of all, if this principle be admitted, we shall never be able to fix any certain boundaries or measures of what is lawful to Christians and what is sinful in them; and consequently every man will be eternally entangled in scruples and perplexities, and there will be no cure for them. If a conformity to the modes and customs of the world be unlawful in all cases, save only where that conformity is absolutely necessary to our living in the world, then we cannot be certain but that every day we do that which is unlawful; for we are not sure but that every day we have complied more with the customs of the world than was barely necessary. There are a hundred things which every man daily doth in compliance with the common usages of mankind, which are noways needful to be done, and may, without any detriment to his life and fortunes, be as well done another way, but only that custom prevails. Now, according to the aforesaid principle, every such action that a man doth must be a sin. But,

(2.) This is a principle which none of those who stand up for it, no, not the strictest of the Quakers themselves, do live up to. (Or if they did, they

would be much more uncouth and ridiculous than they are.) They say we must not be conformable to the mode of the world, as to matter of apparel, for instance : but if this be a true rule, why do not they wear different sort of clothes from what they do ? and since they will take their pattern from scripture, why do not they go in sandals instead of shoes ? why do they not wear long loose vestments, after the manner of the eastern nations ? Both these are undoubtedly more agreeable to the practice of the saints, not only of the Old, but of the New Testament too. Again, if it be unlawful to comply with the times in the matter of clothes and dress, why is it not as much unlawful to use the same way of eating and drinking that others do ? How comes it to pass that they dare use the posture of sitting when they take their meat, since that is the way of the world, and is quite different from that posture that our Saviour and the Christians in his time used at meals ; for their way then was to lean on couches or beds conveniently disposed about the table : but this none of our moderns do observe, notwithstanding their zeal and care to imitate the saints. And a hundred other things there are in which men must reform their manners, if they will practise according to this principle, which yet none of them who contend for it do ; and indeed they are the wiser for not doing it : but yet it is a shrewd argument either that they do not believe their own doctrine, or, if they do, they think it impracticable.

(3.) But further ; this principle that we ought not to be conformable to this world in any thing where we can avoid it, is so contradictory to the spirit by which our Lord Jesus and his apostles were acted,

and according to which they practised, that nothing can be more. As for the apostles, they conversed with all men promiscuously, and after their own way and mode, and one of them was openly reproved by St. Paul, Gal. ii. 14, for not conforming himself to the Gentile way of conversation when he came among the Gentiles, but sticking too closely to that stingy principle of the Jews, who, thinking themselves more holy than the other nations were, would not join with them in the innocent freedom of a common table. And the same St. Paul declares, 1 Cor. ix. 22. that he *became all things to all men, that by this means he might gain more souls*. And it doth not appear that ever the apostles or the first Christians made any scruples of accommodating themselves to the guise and manner of the people they preached to; except only in things which were of themselves unlawful, and contrary to the religion which they were to preach. As to our Saviour, he was a person so far from being morose or reserved in his carriage, or a lover of singularity, so far from setting up a way of conversation of his own making distinct from the way he found in the world, that he was the most free, obliging, and civil, and, if I durst use the word, I would say, the most complaisant person that ever perhaps appeared in the world. Both his language and way of converse, as also his garb and attire, and the whole manner of his carriage and behaviour, was perfectly the same with that of the country in which he dwelt; which thing I wish were well considered by those we have to deal with; for if they did seriously mind it, they would from hence rather draw an argument that we at this day ought to comply in these things with the

customs of the place where we live, because our blessed Lord did so, than conclude, from his way of speaking and carriage and garb, that we are in this age and in this country precisely to imitate him in those particulars. If he in all these things conformed himself to the mode of the country, then in reason we ought to conform ourselves to the mode of ours; and in so doing we shall more truly follow his example. By these light strictures, I have made it sufficiently appear that it is a very absurd principle, that in all things where we may we are bound to frame our conversation in a way different from the customs of the world; and therefore my first proposition stands good, That no man is bound to differ from the world merely for difference sake.

2dly, But now for a more direct resolution of the question we are upon; viz. what kind of conformity to the world is allowable to Christians, I lay down this second proposition, that, generally speaking, it is not only lawful, but expedient and advisable, that in things which are not by the law of God forbidden us, either in general or in particular, we should in such things frame our conversation according to the course of the world. This, I say, is the most general rule, and the practice of it is both lawful and expedient. First of all it is lawful. This appears from the very terms of the proposition, which supposeth that the thing to which we conform is not forbidden by any law. And certainly whatever is not forbidden by a law may lawfully be practised. And that likewise such kind of conformity is generally and for the most part advisable and expedient appears from these two things; first, that otherwise we shall bring a great many need-

less troubles and inconveniences upon ourselves by swimming against the common stream, and yet reap nothing from hence but the reputation of fantasticalness and singularity; which reputation no wise man would much covet, or indeed endure, if he could help it. But, secondly, by not practising this rule of compliance with custom we shall do a great prejudice and disservice to the Christian religion, by possessing men with an ill opinion of it. Our moroseness and singularity in our way of living will be apt to fright all those we converse with from the application of themselves to piety and devotion. If a man cannot live a religious life, and serve God without living contrary to the rest of mankind, without quitting all those liberties and compliances which have always by the most sober part of mankind been thought to be innocent, who will have the courage to set upon religion? Men will necessarily be tempted either to believe that this religion of Christ's is not the true religion; or, if it be, that it is so hard and severe a one that there is no venturing upon it.

But thus much concerning our first point, What kind of conformity to the world is allowable to Christians?

II. I now proceed to the second; What kind of conformity to the world is here forbidden? But concerning this we need not make any words: for having seen what conformity is lawful and allowable, we easily may perceive what that is which is unlawful and forbidden; viz. all compliances with the customs of this world which are sinful, and repugnant to the precepts of our Lord, how much soever they are in vogue; I say, all that kind of compliance is here forbidden us. In every age there

always hath been, and will be, some sins that are in fashion; some customs which, by reason of their commonness, and the countenance that is given them by those whom we are most apt to propose for our examples, are not only accounted no sins at all, though they be really great ones, but get reputation in the world, are thought very decent and commendable. Now as to such as these every Christian is infinitely concerned more especially to watch over himself, that he be not carried away with the common stream; that the customariness of the things, and the approbation and encouragement that they receive from the men of the world, be not a snare to him to go and do likewise. And certainly there are great temptations to a man to practise that which he sees the generality of those he converseth with not only to practise, but to applaud. But here lies the Christian magnanimity: if we will approve ourselves to Jesus Christ as his true disciples we must not desert our station, or in the least depart from those laws he hath set us, though the whole world set us a contrary example. Be a thing never so modish, never so universally practised, never so creditable, yet, if it be sinful, if it contradict that Christianity we are all sworn to, we must abstain, we must not comply, we *must obey God rather than conform to man*. This, without doubt, is the meaning of those frequent precepts we meet with in the New Testament of dying to the world, of crucifying the world, and of not framing our conversation according to the fashion of this world. And this likewise is all that is meant by that promise we all make in our baptism, to renounce all the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. It is not hereby

meant that we should quit every thing that is accounted brave, or splendid, or glorious, or magnificent in the world: no; every thing that attracts the eyes of ordinary spectators is not a pomp; neither is every thing that doth not tend to spiritual edification a vanity in the sense of pomps and vanities which we renounce in our baptismal vow; but only such pomps and vanities as are contradictory to the laws of the gospel, that is to say, are either in their own nature sinful, or do minister to sin. The truth is, these words, when they were first put into the baptismal vow, had a particular respect to the heathen shows and spectacles which were made in their theatres in honour of their idols. And the manner of them was this: there was, besides the shows themselves, (which were indeed barbarous and inhuman, as well as impious, the whole business being the fighting of men with beasts, and with one another, and the representations of the lewd and ridiculous actions of their poetical gods; I say, besides these shows themselves, there was also,) a solemn procession of their idols which went before the shows, and were to usher them in; that is, there was a long train of the images of their gods carried through the streets, and attended with great devotion by all the multitude; and this is that which the first Christians called the pomp of this world. And for a man to be present either at these shows, or the processions that went before them, was always held a thing utterly inconsistent with Christianity. This seems to be the primary notion of the pomps which Christians were to renounce at their baptism, if we may believe those who have the most accurately treated of those matters.

Whether the representations which are made in our days upon the stage do fall under the notion of those pomps we have now spoken of, is a point which I think needs not much be disputed. The representations and spectacles of the heathens were upon a religious account; they were designed in honour of their gods, and were a part of the idolatrous worship which obtained among them. But I believe it will easily be granted, that none frequent our theatres upon account of serving any ends of religion, or doing any honour either to the true God or the false ones. But though it be granted that our shows are not of the nature of those among the pagans, being noways designed for the promoting of an idol-worship, and consequently that they do not fall under the precise notion of the pomps of the world, as the first Christians understood that term: yet if it do appear that they minister to vice and sin, if they tend to the debauching men's manners, if they promote wantonness and luxury, if they insinuate into the minds of the spectators principles of atheism or irreligion; I say, if these be the effects of them, though they are not strictly the pomps of the ancient world, yet they are justly to be styled the pomps of the present, and by parity of reason are to be abandoned by the present Christians as much as those were by the primitive. But whether they be of this nature, or do directly or necessarily tend to the production of such effects, let those who know them best determine. If they do not, I have nothing to say to them. But this by the by.

That which I was saying is, that a Christian's not being conformed to the world, or to the pomps and vanities of it, doth in general consist in not comply-

ing with those sinful customs and usages which do generally obtain in the times and places in which he lives, of what kind soever they be. The precept is levelled against the prevailing fashionable sins of every country, which are various, according to the different ages and the different climates of the world; so that every one is to make an application of the precept to himself, according to the times and places in which he lives.

Now to make some kind of application of it to us at this time; to name some particular instances in which this precept of not conforming to the world doth more especially seem to concern us of this nation, is the third head which I proposed to insist upon.

III. And God knows there are too many instances of sins, and great ones too, fit to be taken notice of, which, through the prevalency of custom and ill example, are become modish and fashionable, even to that degree that they are accounted creditable amongst many, and venial by the most. O that every one of us would seriously lay these to heart, and whenever we remember our vow of renouncing the world, and not being conformed to it, would seriously think ourselves concerned to avoid these sins especially! I shall name some of them; and think it very proper and seasonable to insist a little upon them.

1. The first is, profane swearing in our ordinary conversation, which is so customary, that for a man to use it is accounted no disparagement to him; nay, it is even thought by some persons ornamental. It is made the seasoning of their discourse; it supplies the place both of wit and courage, and of truth too.

Yet there is nothing more expressly forbid by the laws of our Saviour, nor any thing that is more unreasonable in itself, nor from whence either less pleasure or less advantage doth arise to them who use it.

2. Another vice, which by reason of its commonness hath almost lost all disrepute among us, and among some is passed into credit, is revelling and drunkenness; a sin so odious to God, that it is put into the black catalogue of those vices which *whosoever lives in shall not enter into the kingdom of God*, Gal. v. 21. and 1 Cor. vi. 10. And yet so frequently, and with so little scandal is it practised in our days, that business can scarce be despatched, or any mirth or society made without it: and the worst censure that a man ordinarily undergoes for it is, that he is a man of a free humour, an honest-hearted, good-natured companion, and one who is the greatest enemy to himself. As to this, we ought to learn wisdom even from some of those nations of Europe whom we should be loath to imitate in other matters. How lewd and dissolute soever they may be in other respects, yet this sottish vice is generally abhorred by them; and a man who is found guilty of it shall undergo as severe a penance for it from his spiritual guide as for the greatest of crimes.

3. And this gives us occasion, in the third place, to name another sin among us, which is grown so common, that it ought to be cautioned against as one of the prevailing, modish sins of this age, viz. the sin of lewdness and uncleanness. It is a very sad consideration that we should be so far degenerated from the severity and honesty of our forefathers, that that vice, which was heretofore ac-

counted foreign to us, and proper to the southern climates, should not only find entertainment among us, but thrive and propagate as fruitfully as it doth among them. They yet keep our sins out from among them, (namely, those of excessive eating and drinking, as I now said,) but we not only preserve our own sins, but to increase our condemnation have taken in their sins too. I fear this is not spoken without ground; for any one that lives among us, and hears what a slight matter is every day made of pursuing unlawful love, and how trifling a business even adultery itself is accounted, will be convinced that we are grown to a strange pitch of debauchery as to this point. The sense of justice and faith and charity is so far lost among us, that an adulterous love is so far from being punished, so far from being detested and branded, as it should be, that it is only made a business of laughter and merriment. As for that which they call simple fornication, it is by many, and by such too as would be thought Christians, doubted whether it be a sin or no. Will not God visit for these things? will he not some time or other call us to a sad account for this open and scandalous violation and defiance of his most sacred fundamental laws, by which the world is governed and doth subsist? There is not a serious writer among any of the pagans whoever excused such things, much less justified them; and shall we Christians dare to do it? O that we would all seriously consider what St. Paul says in his sixth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, ver. 9. *Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, shall ever enter into the kingdom of God.* So far is he from accounting

fornication, of what kind soever it be, a slight business, that he tells us plainly it is the sin which most of all unhallows and defiles our bodies, which are consecrated by our Christianity to be *the temples of the Holy Ghost*, ver. 15, 16, 17; and doth so alienate the Holy Spirit from us, that he will no longer dwell with us, as we have it in the same chapter : nay, so severe he is against this vice in any one who calls himself a Christian, that he chargeth the Corinthians *not to have any communication, no not so much as to eat with any brother who is guilty of it*, 1 Cor. v. 11. And as for the primitive church, wherein the religion of Christ was most purely taught and observed, so great an abhorrence had they of these crimes, that even for one act of fornication a man was excluded from the congregation of the faithful, and not admitted again to their communion but after a very long and severe penance. And as for the sin of adultery, that was a sin of so heinous a nature, that it was a very great question in some churches whether any Christian who was guilty of it should ever again be restored to the peace of the church.

4. Another reigning sin among us, and which ought not upon this occasion to be passed by without some animadversion, is, the general (unconcernedness shall I say? or the) contempt of religion, and things sacred, which is every where to be seen. We are grown so lukewarm and so indifferent as to these matters, which yet are our greatest concern in this world, that we can patiently hear religion affronted and run down; nay, it is well if we ourselves do not sometimes cast in our mite to the lessening and exposing of it. What is become of that face of devo-

tion that heretofore was to be seen in families and in private conversation too? Where is that care to read God's word, and to teach it to our children and servants, and to perform the duties of devotion both at church and in our own houses, that was practised in former times? Far am I here from commending the late times, when a great many made a great appearance of religion, and yet acted upon such principles as were contrary to all religion. And far am I from giving the least countenance either to such kind of principles or to such kind of actions. But this I am afraid is true, that our zeal for the outward service of God, and the public profession of religion, is much abated, and that we are not so strict in these matters as we ought to be, nor as we have been. And let them who kept up the external and visible characters of religion have been otherwise never so bad, and never so hypocritical, yet we have a sad account to make for our open profaneness. Hypocrisy and profaneness, I think, are both equally damnable to the person who is guilty of them. But yet it is certain to the public it doth less hurt to be strict in the outward profession of religion, (though in a wrong way, and to serve secular ends,) than it doth to neglect or to despise religion, and to live without any regard or even pretences to it. This latter will, without doubt, sooner draw down the judgment of God upon a people. Let all of us, therefore, who have any concernment for our souls; or if we have not for them, yet who have any concernment for the peace and safety of the kingdom where we live, take especial care to own God and his religion in all our conversation. Let us not be so foolish as to forsake it, or so timorous as to be rallied

out of the profession of it by the drollery of atheistical men. I am confident there are abundance more in this nation who have a hearty sense of the truth of religion, than there are who have not. And is it not a pity that the impudence of a lesser party, who have a very bad cause, a cause condemned by all laws, and all good men who have ever been in the world, should either affright or ashame, or any ways put out of countenance the practice of those men, who, as they have the best cause in the world, so are they more in number. It is really our timorousness and easiness, and desire to comply with the humour of our acquaintance, that makes many of us so little careful of God's worship as we are. We have, many of us, better principles in our hearts, than we dare own in our conversation. Is not this a fearful reproach to us? But let us remember what our Saviour hath said, *He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven*, Matt. x. 32, 33. *But he that denieth me before men, him will I deny before my Father, and before the angels of God*, Luke xii. 8, 9.

5. Since we are speaking of the prevailing sins of the age, we ought not to conceal another thing, which, by reason of its great commonness, is accounted either no sin at all, or a very slight one; and that is, the great liberty we take in discoursing of, scanning, and censuring other men's actions; the boldness we make with our neighbour's reputation and good name; taking pleasure in exposing them, and telling stories to their disadvantage. This is so much in use, that it is the entertainment of most conversations. We can hardly find talk enough to

furnish out the civility of a visit, but at the cost of other persons. If they be not the subject of our discourse, how many of us are there who have nothing to say! Nor is it the custom to spare any, but to talk as freely of public persons, and to censure the administration of public affairs, as if the persons were our own servants, or the affairs our own domestic concerns. But this is also one of the customs of the world, which by no means we ought to conform to; for it is against the genius and spirit of Christianity. It is contrary to that charity and kindness, to that modesty and peaceableness which our Lord Jesus hath obliged us to. His law has forbid us to judge or censure others, lest we be judged ourselves, Matt. vii. 1; and his apostle has given us in charge, that we should *speak evil of no man*, Titus iii. 2. James iv. 11; and therefore least of all of those who are in authority.

6. Another thing which is not often taken notice of, but is really a conforming to the unlawful customs of the world, is vanity and excess in our apparel, or in the other outward circumstances of our lives. The humour which most prevails is, to be as splendid and brave as we can: to carry it out with all the pomp and outward show that our purses can reach to; nay, often beyond that, both in our clothes, our equipage, our attendants, and entertainments, and the like: and all this, that we may be taken notice of by others, that we may make some figure in the world, as the word is. But we have all this while no regard either to the gravity of the Christian religion, or our own quality or estate, or those more necessary expenses which ought to be defrayed by us. This now is against the Christian law, and

is a following the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, which we have renounced in our baptism. I deny not but every one may so far conform himself to the guise of the world, as to go in the same habit, and use the same way of living that others do ; but then it is always to be remembered that there is a great deal of prudence to be used in these things. We ought to consider our religion, which, by the nature and contrivance of it, is a grave, serious thing, and enjoins great modesty and severity as to our outward garb and behaviour ; and therefore every thing about us that is loose, that is undecent, that is light, that ministers to pride and lust and vanity, all that is perfectly abhorrent from it. We ought also to consider the rank and quality in which we are in the world. As it is sordid, and savours of an avaricious, penurious spirit, to live below our rank ; so to live above it is an instance of luxury. And, lastly, in these things we are also to consider our estate and fortune, and the necessary charges they are to support. We are but stewards of God's blessings ; and the main use he gave them us for is, after our own necessities are supplied, to make provision for our children and our families, and to minister to the poor and needy. If therefore we spend our revenues in unnecessary finery and entertainments ; if we put them upon our backs or into our bellies ; or if we throw them away in drink, or gaming, or in maintaining a needless pomp and grandeur among men, whilst our families are not duly provided for, nor the poor relieved, nor the public served by the wealth we are blessed with, what a sad account have we to make to God in the other world for these extravagancies !

7. But, lastly, to conclude this head: besides all the fashionable vices I have named, there is one more which ought by no means to be forgot upon this occasion, as being one of the forbidden customs of the world, which comes within the compass of my text; and that is, the practice of duelling, or fighting in private quarrels. A practice which though both the laws of God and man forbid under the severest penalties, yet is still accounted so creditable, that he is no man of honour who either dares not upon any direct affront send a challenge, or dares not accept one. It were heartily to be wished that men would consider to what Master they belong, and what religion they profess. Was this the spirit of our blessed Saviour, who came to give us an example; and whose example we must either follow, or we cannot be his disciples? Is this an imitation of his meekness, and patience, and gentleness, and charity, *who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not*, 1 Peter ii. 23. but willingly *gave his back to the smiters*, Isai. l. 6. and instead of revenging himself on his enemies, as he easily might have done, *laid down his life for them*? And what is there which his religion doth more severely forbid, than this revenging of injuries in a private way; or doth more strictly enjoin, than forbearance and forgiveness, even so strictly, that we cannot according to his religion, without hypocrisy, say our daily prayers, unless we be in charity with all the world?

Well; but a man's honour lies at stake, and for the saving of that, a man must demand satisfaction when he is affronted, or he must give satisfaction when it is demanded. Why, let it be so: but sure

there are other kinds of satisfaction both to be demanded and given besides that of murdering one another, especially in a civilized country, where the law hath provided for the reparation of all such injuries as need reparation, and where the execution of vengeance is only intrusted in the hands of public authority. But suppose a man's honour cannot be saved this way, yet is it not very unreasonable to prefer our honour before our Christianity? If our honour and our obedience to God must necessarily come into competition, surely we should resolve to part with that, and every other thing that is dearest to us, rather than to depart from this. O, if men had any belief or consideration of another world, when they engage in these kinds of actions, they would tremble to think what a desperate venture they run! If either of the parties should happen to die in the encounter, in what a dismal condition are they both! the one, in dying without repentance, with all his sins about him; the other, for being his murderer!

But after all, what is this honour which we prize so much, that we will venture upon damnation rather than it shall suffer? Is it not an unaccountable fancy, without any foundation in reason or nature, taken up at first by boisterous, unthinking men, and afterwards as foolishly embraced by others? Sure I am, these notions of honour which obtain in the world, and which occasion these private quarrels, were never put into the minds of men by God Almighty, but are rather of the Devil's devising, because they do so directly tend to make us of his spirit and temper. The natural notions of honour are of another strain. That man only, according to the

measures of reason and nature, is a man of honour, who hates to do any thing that is mean and base, be it never so much for the gratifying his private interests or passions; and who hath such a quick and tender sense of virtue and goodness, that he always chooses to do the best and the worthiest actions, without any respect to himself or his private concerns. Now this is truly generous and brave and honourable, and all the world must acknowledge it so; for it is to act as God doth; it is to copy out his perfections, and to live up to the dignity of our nature. But now for a man to venture upon a bad and wicked action, an action that he knows his religion hath strictly forbidden; an action which, besides the ill consequences to his family, doth expose both his body and soul to destruction; and this too, for no other reason but to gratify a private, blind, impotent passion of his own, viz. either the passion of anger, that he may be revenged of his adversary; or, which is worse, the bare passion of fear, that he may not be thought a coward; I say, for a man upon such accounts to venture upon such an action, (and yet there is not a duel fought, but it is both such an action, and is undertaken upon such account,) where is the sense of honour in this? Where is the bravery and greatness and magnanimity that is expressed? Certainly thus to act is so far from being an argument of a great and generous mind, that it rather shews a man to be of a mean, narrow, selfish, and contracted spirit. I cannot indeed deny but that there may be a great deal of courage expressed in these kinds of undertakings; but yet must say, it is a brutish courage, such as is common to other animals of our climate as well as our men.

But if indeed it be so absolutely necessary to the preservation of a man's honour and reputation that he should express his courage and valour, I do believe that wise and good men may every day find occasions enough of doing it, without ever putting themselves to the trouble or the danger of fighting duels.

But thus much is sufficient to have spoken as to the particular instances of fashionable sins which are here forbidden in the text, which was our third point. But it must be acknowledged, that the prohibition in the text of not conforming to the world may and ought to be extended further than to the customs of the world, which are plainly sinful, and against the laws of God, such as all those are that I have hitherto mentioned. There are several other things which, though they are not perhaps against any express command of God, yet it will be fit for sober Christians to abstain from them. And there are several things and customs likewise, which, though they may be lawful and innocent in themselves, yet prove sinful by accident, at some times, and in some circumstances, and to some persons; and yet at other times, and in other circumstances, and to other persons, they will not be so. Now, with respect to such things and customs as these, I put our

IV. Fourth and last inquiry, viz. by what rules and measures we are to guide ourselves in the matter of conformity to the world, that what is lawful in itself may not become unlawful or sinful to us.

And because the circumstances of things are infinite, all that I can do is to lay down three or four general rules for our conversation, to which we are

to apply particulars as they come in our way. I shall do little more than name them, and so conclude.

1. If we mean to live serious and conscientious lives, and not to abuse those liberties which our religion allows us, it is fit that we should abstain from a conformity with the world to those customs and practices which, though they are not directly forbid by the letter of God's laws, yet are of ill fame and report among wise and good men. This is that which St. Paul obligeth Christians to, when he bids them *to provide things honest in the sight of all men*, 2 Cor. viii. 21. By honest things he there means things that are decent and comely, and such as no good person can justly take offence at. Again, in the Thessalonians, 1 Epist. v. 22. he bids Christians *to abstain from all appearance of evil*. Any thing that looks like a sin, or is so accounted by wise and conscientious men, should be forborne by Christians, unless there be great and urgent reasons for the contrary. And accordingly as Christians are exhorted to pursue every thing that is just and good and virtuous, so are they every thing that is laudable and of good report, as the same apostle elsewhere speaks, Philipp. iv. 8. Now nothing is of good report but what is thought well of, at least thought innocent, by serious, prudent, and virtuous Christians. Though it passes never so currently among some of our acquaintance, yet if it be of an ill name among those whose judgments in point of prudence we ought most to set by in this matter, and whose examples we ought chiefly to follow, it is a sufficient reason to make us forbear the practice of that thing, if we will act safely. It would be easy

to name some practices too much in use among several of us, which, if this rule was observed, must necessarily be laid aside.

2. A second rule which I lay down is this : those innocent compliances with the world, which are unquestionably unlawful in themselves, yet if they be practised by us out of ill designs ; if by these compliances we mean to serve any ends of pride, or lust, or ambition, or the like, they cease to be innocent to us, and we are guilty thereby of an unlawful conformity to the world. The main thing in those compliances that God looks upon, and that we ought to look upon also, is the inward principle of the heart, from whence they proceed : if that be laudable and justifiable, the usage is so likewise. But if we will follow the mode of the world to gratify some ill affection in us, the whole thing is naught ; it is a *making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*, Rom. xiii. 14.

3. In this kind of things there is great regard and consideration to be had of our own tempers and inclinations. There are several things we might innocently enough comply with, and conform to the world in, if we had the perfect government of ourselves. But yet the weakness of our tempers may be such, that if we use these compliances we shall be drawn into horrible great inconveniences : we shall be betrayed into sin, though we meant no such thing. Now where we have such experience of ourselves, in this case it is advisable to abridge ourselves even of our lawful liberties. Thus for instance ; if we cannot adorn ourselves, or wear rich clothes, but we are in danger to think ourselves the better for them, or to be drawn away to pursue

some undecent design upon the account of them ; if we cannot go into such a sort of company but we are drawn into intemperance, or foolish talking ; if we cannot play at any innocent game, but we are apt either to be angry if we lose, or to play for considerable sums of money, or the like ; in all these cases it is the best wholly to forbear these things, and to deny ourselves lawful liberties, that we may preserve our innocency, and not engage in things unlawful.

4. To conclude : though we may conform to the world in all lawful things, yet to make a constant practice of some things which are lawful in themselves will become unlawful to us, and will prove such a conformity to the world as is here forbidden. A thing may be done now and then, that may be innocent enough, and we shall deserve no blame for it. But if we make a common practice of the thing, so as to spend our time in the minding of it, to the neglect of other more necessary business, it will in this case be so far from being lawful, that it will be a grievous sin in us. For instance, to use innocent pastimes and recreations, to enjoy our friends, and make visits, and the like, is not only allowable, but highly commendable : but yet to make a trade of these things, so wholly to give up ourselves to them, as to spend most of our time in them, this is intolerable, and we shall be called to account for it in the other world. The reason of this is evident : the main business we have to do in this world is to serve God and benefit our neighbours, and to fit ourselves for eternity. This is our great work, and all those other things we are speaking of ought to be managed and ordered by us in subservience there-

unto; so that they may promote that great end, and noways hinder it. But if we so place our affections, and bestow our time upon them, that one would think we make them our great design, and not the other; then we cannot be innocent, but are horribly unjust both to God and our own souls.

These are the general rules by which we ought to steer ourselves in the practice of the apostle's precept of *not conforming to the world*. The further applying them to particulars is left to every one, as he finds himself concerned.

The sum of all is, *we should first seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof*, Matt. vi. 33. and seriously endeavour in all our conversation to recommend ourselves to our Lord and Master, by a diligent observance of all his commands, and abstaining from all the pollutions of the flesh and the world. And as for those gratifications and liberties that our religion allows us, we should, as to them, *use the world, as though we used it not*; taking them only by way of convenience and accommodation for our more easy passage through this world into the other.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE PRINCE OF ORANGE,
JAN. 27, 1688.

1 COR. xi. 19.

For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

IT is a great stumblingblock to some among us, and almost tempts them to doubt of the truth of our religion, to see how many sects and divisions there are at this day among Christians. The removing this stumblingblock is the thing I design at this time, and my text lays a very good foundation towards it; St. Paul having several ages ago told us that there *must be heresies*, and withal given us a good reason why there *must be*, viz. that *they which are approved may be made manifest*.

The method I shall observe in treating on these words shall be as follows :

I. To give some account of what is here meant by *heresies*.

II. To shew how it comes to pass that there always *must be heresies*.

III. To shew for what reasons God permits heresies, and what purposes they serve.

IV. To make an application of the whole.

I. I begin with the first point, What is meant by *heresies*. Now as to this, it is to be observed, that the word *heresy* is often to be met with in scrip-

ture ; and sometimes in that sense in which it is commonly used by profane authors, when it imports no more than some considerable difference in opinion, or such a distinction of men as to their judgment, as makes them of a different sect from the rest they converse with : and thus Christianity itself is styled a *heresy* in the twenty-eighth of the Acts, ver. 22. But then it cannot be denied that the word is often taken in a bad sense, and undoubtedly it is so in my text ; and besides the bare difference of opinion, or being of a different sect from others, denotes some great fault in the man that holds that opinion, or that is of that sect. Were it not thus, we cannot imagine that St. Paul, when he is reckoning up the works of the flesh, such as murder, and adultery, and the like, should put in heresy among them, as he doth in the fifth of Galatians, ver. 20. Well, now the question is, What is meant by *heresy* when it is taken in a bad sense, when it is made one of *the works of the flesh* ? Now, in answer to this, I say, there are two notions of heresy in the New Testament, when that word is taken in an ill sense ; for sometimes it is used with respect to the Christian faith ; and sometimes with respect to Christian peace and communion : of both these I shall now give an account.

I. Heresy is sometimes used with respect to the Christian faith ; and then the notion of it is this : it is a departure from or a renouncing of some necessary article of the Christian religion ; and that not so much through ignorance or mistake, as from a vicious principle, and for the serving some sensual desires or interests. This, I say, is the notion of heresy with reference to faith, as far as we can judge from those texts of scripture which speak of it in

this sense. St. Peter thus describes heretics: he tells us, that as *there were false prophets among the Jews*, so there should be *false teachers among the Christians*, who should *privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them*, 2 Pet. ii. 1. *And through covetousness with feigned words making merchandise of souls*, ver. 3. St. Paul also bids Titus to *reject an heretic, after the first and second admonition; forasmuch as he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself*, Titus iii. 10, 11. These are the two principal texts of scripture that speak of heresy or heretics with reference to matters of faith; and I doubt not but it is from these two texts that the common ecclesiastical notion of heresy, as it is distinguished from schism, is taken up. But now from these two texts we plainly see that heresy is not so much a fault of a man's understanding as of his will. In the sense of these two apostles, he only is an heretic that denies some fundamental truths of Christ's religion, that subverts the faith, and teaches doctrines inconsistent with Christianity; and this out of evil principles, so that his own conscience cannot but accuse him. But he is not a heretic, however he may be mistaken in matters of religion, who holds to the foundation of the Christian faith, and means honestly, and endeavours to inform himself as well as he can. So that it is in every man's power to avoid the being a heretic, and none but a wicked person can be so. St. Augustin, I am sure, was of this opinion, when he said, *Errare possum, hæreticus esse nolo*; "I may be under errors or mistakes, but I will not be an heretic." Intimating that it was not so much defect of the understanding,

as vice and sin, and a corrupt inclination of mind, that made a man to deserve that name.

The reflection I make upon what I have now said about heresy in matters of faith is this: we see from hence how groundlessly, how unreasonably we protestants are charged with heresy by our adversaries. They make no scruple of calling us heretics, and telling us we shall be damned upon that account, unless we come over to their belief. Why, what is it they would have us believe? we believe all that Jesus Christ and his apostles taught to the world, so far as we have knowledge of it: we believe all the holy scriptures; and not only so, but we make them the rule of our faith: we believe all those articles of faith into which all Christians in every country from Christ's time to this have been baptized, and which by all the ancients have been accounted a perfect summary of the Christian faith; nor do we hold any thing inconsistent with them: we own both Christ's sacraments; and we administer them entirely. We renounce all the heresies that were condemned by the ancient general councils; nay, we are ready to refer ourselves to those councils, and to the primitive fathers who lived at that time, for the trial of all the points which are disputed between us. And, lastly, we are sure we are not obstinate in our errors, if they should prove so; we are sure we have no secular ends to serve in the maintaining them; and most of all sure we are, that we are not self-condemned, that our own conscience doth not accuse us for being of this way: (which yet is one of those things that go to the making of an heretic:) now if all these things can be truly said of us, (as I think they may be truly said of the church of England,

and of all the honest members of it,) how is it possible that we can in any sense be guilty of heresy? In the sense of the scriptures and of the fathers I am sure we are orthodox Christians; and in the sense of the greatest divines, even in the Roman communion, I am sure we are no heretics. And if, after all that, we must be branded with that name, all that we can say is, that *after the way which they call heresy, so worship we the God of our fathers*, Acts xxiv. 14.

But, 2dly, there is another notion of heresy in the holy scriptures besides that I have now mentioned; and that is with respect to ecclesiastical peace and communion: as a man who deserts the faith is guilty of heresy, so is he who causelessly breaks the communion of the church a heretic also in the language of the scripture.

Now in this sense heresy is the same thing with that which we call *schism*; and in this sense I do verily believe St. Paul meant it in the text I am now upon. That he did so will appear to any one who will look two verses backwards, and observe how the text comes in. In the 17th verse of this chapter St. Paul tells the Corinthians, that he had one thing *to declare to them, for which he was far from praising them*; and that was, *that they came together not for the better, but for the worse*. Now what that was which rendered their assemblies so unprofitable, or rather so prejudicial to them, he tells them in the 18th verse; *For*, says he, *when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you*; [the original words are, *I hear there be schisms, σχίσματα, among you*;] and, says he, *I partly believe it*; and then he gives the

reason why he is so inclinable to believe this of them in the words of my text, *For*, says he, *there must be heresies among you*. So that it is evident that what he called schisms or divisions in the former verse, he calls heresies in the following verse, and consequently that he meant the same thing by both those words. It is wholly indifferent to my present business in which of these two senses the words of my text be interpreted : I shall, in what I have further to say, have respect to both ; only, before I proceed, I would make a reflection upon this notion of heresy, as I did upon the former. According to the sense I have now given of the text every one who makes divisions, every one that causeth schisms, is guilty of heresy. This is true, and let those who are concerned in it look to it. It must be acknowledged, that as Christianity now stands in the world, nay, as it hath stood for several ages, there have been, and are, a great many divisions and schisms in the church. They who are united in one common faith are not united in one common communion, as the primitive churches were. That is indeed the infelicity and misery of Christendom ; and all good men do sadly lament it : but woe be to them by whom this offence cometh !

There are who call us schismatics, because we are now in a state of separation from the church of Rome upon account of our reformation ; but we are sure we do not deserve that name. If indeed it did appear either that that church was the only catholic church out of which there is no salvation ; or that we had departed further from that church, or any church, than we are convinced they have departed from the primitive rule of Christ and his apostles ;

or, that what was done in our reformation was done without lawful and sufficient authority; or, that at this day we refuse communion with any, or with all the churches in the world, upon such terms as either the laws of Christ will allow us, or the primitive churches would have submitted to; I say, if any of these things could be made out against us, there would be some colour to accuse us of schism from the catholic church for adhering to our reformation. But since it may be made evident that the quite contrary to all these things is true; since it may be made evident that the Roman church is but a particular church, and that we in this nation have within ourselves as full and as independent authority to reform abuses in doctrine and worship, as she or any other church hath; and since it may be made evident that nothing was done in our reformation but by lawful and good authority, and that we have in no instance departed from the catholic church, no nor from the Roman, save where their terms of communion were inconsistent with our duty to God; and that we are at this day ready to join in communion with all the churches in the world upon the primitive catholic terms; I say, this being our case, it is as impossible we should be guilty of schism in adhering to our reformation, as it is we should be guilty of heresy when we own all catholic doctrines.

Having thus given an account of heresy, both as it signifies a departure from faith and a departure from ecclesiastical communion, I now come, in the second place, to give some account of St. Paul's proposition, that there *must be heresies*, take that word in which of the two senses you please. St. Paul

says that *there must be heresies*; that is to say, it cannot be avoided but that there will be errors and mistakes in matters of faith; there will be sects and parties and factions in religion; nay, it cannot be avoided but there will be such men as will endeavour to bring in dangerous doctrines into the church. *I know*, says St. Paul in another place, *that grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And of yourselves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them*, Acts xx. 29, 30. And this indeed is no more than what our Saviour had told us before; *Woe*, says he, *unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come*, Matt. xviii. 7. Ἀνάγκη γάρ ἐστιν, *there is a necessity for it*; or, as St. Luke expresses it, Ἀνένδεκτόν ἐστι μὴ ἐλθεῖν; *It is impossible but offences will come*, chap. xvii. 1. Now certainly among those offences which our Saviour speaks of, heresies and schisms were not the least.

But it will be asked, Why must there be heresies and schisms? whence doth the necessity of them arise? I answer, It doth arise from the present corrupt frame of human nature, and the constitution of things in this world. To say that there will always be heresies and schisms, is no more than to say that there will always be in the world some men who will be so knavish, as for worldly ends to endeavour to seduce others from the ways of truth and peace; and that there will be others so foolish as to be seduced by them. Hence it is that all heresies and schisms do arise; and till it please God to keep sin and folly out of the world, and by an overruling hand to preserve men from abusing that natural li-

berty he hath given them; I say, till God doth this, it cannot be expected that the church should be free from these things. It is not for want of a plain rule to know our duty that any man becomes either a heretic or schismatic, nor is it his own venturing to make a judgment of that rule which makes him so. For as the rule of religion is infinitely plain in all necessary points; (and as for unnecessary ones it is not a farthing matter how much men differ about them, so long as they do not break charity and the churches' peace upon account thereof;) I say, as the rule of religion is infinitely plain in all necessary matters, so, when all is done, every man must judge for himself as to the meaning of that rule. But here is the thing: it is the want of honesty and virtue, it is vice and sin, it is pride or ambition, or envy or discontent; it is the love of the world and the desire of serving some secular interest; I say, these are the things that make an heretic; these are the things that both gave birth to all the heresies and schisms that are among Christians, and will perpetuate them to the world's end. And this I suppose is abundantly sufficient to make out the truth of St. Paul's proposition, that there *must be heresies*. For so long as God is pleased to permit sin and folly in the world, so long he must be supposed to permit heresies.

But it will be said, Is not God in the mean time very unkind to his church, by suffering it to be thus exposed to divisions and false opinions? How can this consist either with his promises in the scripture, or with the goodness of his providence? I answer, That as to the promises which God has made in scripture concerning his church, they are all safe,

whatever heresies or schisms there be in the world. For all that God hath promised about the church in scripture is this, that there shall always be a company of men professing his true religion, with whom he will be present by the influence of his holy Spirit even to the end of the world. Now this promise Christ hath hitherto made good, and we doubt not will do so, as long as the world lasts. But he has nowhere promised that his church shall be free from errors or divisions; on the contrary, both himself and his apostles have told us that we are to expect such things. And then, as for the other point, how this can consist with the goodness of God's providence, the answer is easy: for the same reason that God is pleased to permit the vices and wickednesses of mankind, for the same reason he is pleased to permit heresies and schisms in the church. And the reason both of the one and the other is very obvious; viz. that very great and good ends are served by them. The common method of God's providence is to suffer all his creatures to act according to the powers which he hath conferred upon their natures, and accordingly, having endued mankind with liberty and choice, so as that they may do well or do ill, he permits them to exercise those powers, though oftentimes they employ them to ill purposes. But then here appears the wisdom and goodness of his providence, that he has so contrived things, that that which is bad in itself, and very bad likewise to them that do it, shall prove very good, if we respect the whole creation. My meaning is this, God doth not hinder natural events, but he so orders matters that very excellent ends and purposes are served by the worst things that

happen in the world. Heresy and schism are very bad things, and woe be to them who have any hand in them; but yet, for all that, they bring a great deal of good to mankind. And I do not in the least doubt but St. Paul had an eye to this in the words of my text. We render them thus, *there must be heresies*; but in the original they seem to import somewhat more. The Latin version fully expresses it, *oportet esse hæreses*; “it is fit, it is meet, it is convenient there should be heresies,” because many excellent ends are served by them; a great deal accrues from them to the church of Christ. And this leads me to the third general head I am to insist on, viz.

III. To shew for what reason God permits heresies, and what ends they serve for; and particularly to explain the reason given by St. Paul, viz. *that they which are approved may be made manifest*.

1. And here I cannot but in the first place take notice of this, that the being of heresies and divisions amongst Christians is a great confirmation to us, not only that the scripture is our true rule of faith, but also that we have the true scriptures. It has often been taken notice of as a very remarkable thing, and really it is so, that the Jews, who have ceased to be a commonwealth for above 1600 years, and have had no place of abiding, but have been and are scattered into all the places of the habitable world; nay further, at several times all means imaginable have been used for the rooting them out from the face of the earth; do yet, notwithstanding all this, continue not only in being, but continue as distinct from all other people, and as obstinately tenacious of their own religion, as they were when

they lived under their own government in the land of Canaan. There is no instance like this to be given in story. What use now is to be made of this? Why, (as many have observed, and St. Austin particularly,) this is a standing proof of the Christian religion; and that (to omit other instances) in this respect these people are the bitterest adversaries that the Christian religion ever had; but yet these people always have, and still do own, nay and are very zealous for that very canon of scripture upon which we Christians do ground our religion, and from which we fetch the chief arguments that we bring against them: nay, and they, of all sorts of people, have been the most careful to preserve copies of these scriptures entire, and free from any corruption or alteration. From whence we Christians have a demonstrative argument that the scriptures of the Old Testament which we urge against the Jews are sincere and uncorrupted; that there have been no tricks played, no fraud or forgery used by us to make these writings speak as they do, since the greatest enemies we have in the world do bear testimony to us that we have the true scriptures, and do themselves make use of the same copies which we do.

To bring this now to our purpose: the same thing that the Jews our adversaries do for the Old Testament do the heretics and schismatics among us for the New. Had not these been in the church, we could not have been so secure of the rule of our faith: neither the authority, nor the sufficiency, nor the genuineness and uncorruptedness of the New Testament could ever so well have been made to appear. But now since there always have been he-

resies and diversities of opinions, since there always have been schisms and factions in the church of Christ, and all of these, how disagreeing soever otherwise, have always pleaded the scripture for themselves, and have appealed to the writings of the apostles and evangelists, as the infallible rule by which they would have their doctrines to be tried; and since further their books differ nothing from ours, but they read and quote the Gospels and Epistles as we do, without any material difference or variation, and have always done so; (excepting some few of the ancient heretics, who were so bold as utterly to reject some entire books of our present canon;) I say, laying all these things together, it is a very strong argument both that our scriptures are the only true and certain rule by which we are to be determined in matters of faith, and also that they are purely and sincerely conveyed to us without any considerable variation from the original copies: which two things are of considerable moment and importance to every Christian. And yet these two things could not have been near so well evidenced and made out, had there been no heresies or divisions in the Christian church. By the being of these we gain testimony of our adversaries both to the truth and the integrity of the rule we proceed by: and the testimony of an adversary is in all disputes accounted the strongest proof that can be given of a thing.

2dly, Another excellent end that heresies serve in the world, and for which God permits them, is this, that they extremely tend to excite men's industry, and to put them upon the search of truth. They prove an excellent means to persuade men that they

ought not in matters of salvation be prescribed to by others; but that they should *examine all things*, and *hold fast to that which*, upon their examination, they found *to be true and good*, according to the apostle's rule, 1 Thess. v. 21.

God Almighty did not make us engines and machines, to be acted and moved at the pleasure of others; but having given us the power of reason and judgment, he meant we should exercise them, not only in matters of a civil, temporal concernment, but also in matters of religion too. He designed not only that every one of us should satisfy ourselves about our religion, but that we should take some pains in gaining that satisfaction to ourselves; that we should employ the best of our skill and our wit and our parts in inquiring into these matters; that so we might perform to him a reasonable service. There is none can deny but that this is a design both worthy of God and most suitable to the nature and faculties of men. But now how could this design have been served, at least half so effectually, if there had not been differences in opinion; if there had not been heresies and false doctrines and schisms in the world? If all men from the beginning of Christianity had been of the same belief and persuasion and communion, what occasion would any man have had to examine or inquire into the grounds and principles of his religion? What would he have to do further as a Christian than only to believe and practise as he saw others do before him? that is to say, all men's parts and industry must have been turned quite another way; and the business of religion would not at all have employed them: and they would indeed have been at a profound peace,

but at the same time all study and search into truth would have been superseded. A numbness and stupidity would have seized all their faculties, and ignorance and an implicit faith would then (as it is now in all places where they make it their business by fire and inquisition to prevent all differences in opinion,) have been the only parents of devotion.

Whereas on the contrary, heresies and schisms in the church, though they be ill in themselves, and, as I said before, woe be to those who cause them or foment them, or have any thing to do with them; yet by the wise contrivance of God's providence, whose method it is to bring good out of evil, I say, they serve to this good use, that they whet men's industry, and put them upon thinking, and keep them from being secure in or resting upon any one bare authority, till they have fully inquired into the matter. By which means, if they use their faculties as they should do, they are enabled to serve God as he desires to be served, that is to say, in a way suitable to the nature of mankind, which is with reason and understanding.

3. But, thirdly, as the being of heresies in the world doth quicken men's diligence, and excite them to a more serious inquiry into the affairs of religion, so doth it also tend very much to the advancement of truth; and many points hereby have been fully and satisfactorily cleared, which otherwise might probably still have remained in obscurity. Of this I give but this one argument. All those who have in the least dealt in antiquity, know how loosely and unwarily the first writers of the church expressed themselves as to some points of religion. And the reason is, those points were not then suffi-

ciently sifted ; there had been at that time no controversies moved about them. But afterwards when heretics arose, and taught in those matters things contrary to sound doctrine, and the sense of the church, this gave occasion to those who were concerned more narrowly to inquire into those matters, and upon that inquiry they gained many points of truth, which before possibly were not thought of, or at least not so distinctly apprehended. And from henceforward they expressed themselves less ambiguously, and with more accuracy, and with greater evidence. And this is easy to be made appear both in the Arian and Pelagian controversies, and in a great many others. And, in truth, take what points of religion, what articles of faith we will, experience will shew that the more obstinately that point or article hath been denied, that denial and opposition hath occasioned both a clearer distinction of truth from falsehood in that point or article, and a stronger confirmation and proof of that truth ; and hath besides often brought to light many new propositions of truth, some of which possibly were not at all before taken notice of, and some of them not believed, and some of them, though believed, yet neither rightly expressed nor sufficiently proved. For the truth of this, I might give remarkable instances in most of the points disputed between the church of Rome and us from the beginning of the reformation to this time. But it is not my design to enter now into these particulars : but I proceed, in the

Fourth place, to consider another excellent end for which God permits heresies in the church ; and that is the particular reason given by the apostle in my text ; viz. the trial of men's sincerity, faith, and

constancy : *There must, says he, be heresies, that those which are approved may be made manifest ;* i. e. that they who are sincere and honest may by this trial be known and distinguished from others who are not so. And to the same purpose doth old Simeon affirm, that our Saviour *was set up for the fall and rising again of many in Israel ; and for a sign that should be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed,* Luke ii. 34, 35. i. e. our Saviour's person and doctrine should meet with much opposition and contradiction, that hereby the inward dispositions of men's hearts, and their pretences to religion might be discovered, whether they were honest and sincere or no. And thus also St. John, in his First Epistle, chap. ii. 19, speaking of the antichrists or heretics of those days, *They went out, says he, from us, that it might be made manifest that they were not of us.* Here therefore is one great use that God in his providence makes of the quarrels, and contentions, and heresies, and schisms that happen among Christians. They serve the same ends to believers within the church, that persecution doth from without. God permits them for the exercise and improvement of the virtue of the good, and for the discovery of the ill designs and hypocritical professions of the bad. If all men had been of one faith and of one communion, where would have been the trial of the faith and patience of the saints ? What occasion would they have had to exercise their courage and constancy in standing up for the truth ? How should either others or they themselves have known whether they were sincere, or whether they did not take up their religion for the serving some private interest or secular design ?

Further, what would have become of that peace of conscience and those comfortable reflections that good men after they have once been tried may make upon their own sincerity, and which causeth a continual joy of heart to them? And where had been those additional glories and rewards in the other world, with which God crowns all those who have endured temptation, and yet are found faithful to the last? Lastly, to say no more, how should either the knavery, the ambition, the self-seeking, or the treachery, inconstancy, and cowardice of many pretenders to religion have been detected? These ends every body sees are for the good of the church, and the good of all honest men; but yet they could not have been attained, had there been no divisions or false religions in the world.

IV. And thus much of my third general head. I come now to the fourth and last, which is, to make some application of what has been said, and so conclude.

And first of all; since it appears that there always will, and unavoidably must be heresies, differences in opinion concerning religion, false doctrines, and divisions, and the like; from hence we gather how absurd and unreasonable those men are who think it a sufficient reason why they should deny or reject a religion or doctrine, because all men are not agreed about it, or because they who in general own and profess that religion or doctrine, are yet at difference among themselves about several points relating to it.

This inference I chiefly direct against the atheistical infidel sort of men among us, who think they do sufficiently baffle all religion when they tell us

that mankind are not yet agreed about the true one. The Turks, say they, have one religion, the Jews another, the pagans another, the Christians another; and all these several sorts of men are peremptory and confident that they only have the true religion, and that all the rest are mistaken, and are in a dangerous condition for being so. What therefore, say they, have we to do in this case? with whom shall we join? All these men pretend to have the true religion among them; which of them shall we believe? Is it not much to be presumed that they are all equally in a mistake, and that religion (how much noise soever it makes) is nothing but a pretence? and till men be agreed what religion is, or where it is to be found, it is the wisest to be of no religion at all, or rather to be seemingly of any that best serves our turns and interests. This is the conclusion that they draw from these premises: but how monstrously absurd and illogical is it! It is just as if they should thus argue; because there are a great many counterfeit stones go about in the world, therefore there are no true jewels, and a man, whose profession lies that way, is not concerned to make use of his skill and reason and judgment for the distinguishing between the one and the other. It is just as if a sick man should resolve, that till all physicians were agreed about the nature of his distemper, and gave the same account of it, and prescribed the same medicines in order to his cure, he would take no physic at all. It is just as wise a conclusion as a man should make, that because the philosophers in Tully's time were divided into above an hundred opinions about that which made a happy life in this world, should therefore determine that

there was no such thing as happiness, and therefore he would not trouble his head about it. But if nothing must be believed, if no design must be pursued, till all men be agreed about it, what proposition is there that we can have any certainty of, or what project, what business can we safely or reasonably propose to ourselves to carry on? Is there any truth in the world, though never so plain, but hath met with opposition and contradiction? Have there not been men in the world who have called in question the strictest mathematical demonstrations? Are there not yet those in the world who will not allow us in some cases to believe our own senses? If therefore a man must suspend his belief of any point, or suspend his action in any matter of business, till all men have given their opinion in the point the same way, he must never believe any thing nor do any thing all his life long. God hath furnished us with reason and understanding wherewith to examine things, and he hath contrived the world so as to let us see that, in most cases, we must of necessity act upon probable grounds and motives. It is our parts therefore to use our reason as well as we can, and to act with as much prudence as we can; and if we do this, be it in the choice of our religion, or in any other matter, how different soever other men's opinions be, yet we have done well, and God will bless the issue. And if we had not done thus, but deferred our resolutions till all men concurred with us, we had plainly been either fools or madmen.

But, secondly, from the grounds I have laid down, it appears that the Romanists are every whit as extravagant as the infidels and atheists, when they ob-

ject to us the differences of opinion, and the many divisions that are among us protestants ; and would from hence draw an argument to those persons they tamper with, that our church or our religion cannot be true. But why may we not be in the true church, or have the true religion for all that ? Must there be always divisions in the church of Christ, (as St. Paul saith there must,) and must the protestants be therefore out of the church, because they have divisions among them ? The papists themselves, how much soever they boast of their unity, are not without their divisions, nay, and great ones, and as to several important points. Nay, further, I dare affirm, that as to the church of England, there is at this day as much unity among her members, as to all points both of doctrine and worship, as there is among the members of any church in the world. So that if this be an argument, it concludes nothing against us. But besides, let the differences of the protestants be as wide as you please, yet I am sure they do all agree in more than is simply necessary to be believed in order to salvation. Nay, I am sure, as great as their differences are, they are not greater than those were which happened among the Christians in the apostles' days ; and yet for all that, those Christians were not unchurched upon account of those differences. The apostles still owned them as members of the church of Christ ; nay, and this too, (which really ought to be considered,) though they were more inexcusable for their differences and divisions than we now are ; because they had an infallible authority to resort to, (viz. that of the apostles,) for the deciding all their controversies, which we have not. We see then how frivolous and un-

concluding their way of arguing is. But that which I have now intimated puts me in mind of another thing which it will not be unprofitable upon this occasion to observe ; and that is this very consideration, that there were schisms and divisions and errors among the Christians, even in the apostles' times, would make any reasonable man believe, that were that true which the Romanists pretend, viz. that there was, and is, and shall be always an infallibility lodged in the Christian church ; yet even that would not be sufficient to keep disputes, and controversies, and heresies, and schisms out of the world : for still men would be men ; they would have particular humours and passions to be gratified ; they would have sensual ends and interests to carry on ; and then all this infallibility would signify nothing for the ending of controversies, or preventing schisms or heresies among Christians. For, as I said, surely the apostles were guided by an infallible Spirit ; and all Christians in those times knew them to be so ; but were not for all this able to put an end to all the controversies and heresies and divisions that broke out in the church in their days : no, we have sufficient evidence to the contrary ; and this very text we are upon, were there no other argument, would make good what I say.

The second application which I would make of this point is to ourselves, who believe and profess the reformed religion. It is, you see, the pleasure of God to permit heresies and schisms in the church for the trial of men's honesty and sincerity. And it must be owned, that we of this nation have been sufficiently exercised with trials of this kind ; especially from a church which, though it calls itself ca-

tholic, is founded in principles the most destructive of catholic unity of any communion in Christendom. But, blessed be God, we have so stood these trials, that we have no reason to be ashamed, nor have they any great reason to boast of their victory. We are now, by the good providence of God, in such a posture, that we hope we shall not need to have much apprehension of that sort of trial for the future. But still there is another sort of trial of this nature that we remain exposed to; viz. the differences and dissensions among ourselves; and O, would to God some balm could be found for the healing of these wounds! Is it not a pity that we who are all of one religion, and do equally profess an aversion to the tyranny and corruptions and superstitions of the church of Rome, should yet be at such a distance from one another that we cannot worship God together? It is true, as I have said, that this is no just exception against our reformation, but yet it must needs be owned that it is a great blemish to it. It is true that there will always be heresies and schisms in the church, and there would be, though all protestants were united: but yet for all that, it is a great reproach to us that they are not better united. I grant that as to unity of opinion in all points of religion, the thing is impracticable; for when all is done, men, according to the variety of their parts and tempers and educations, must of necessity think several ways, and consequently they will always differ in their notions of things; and there can no more one fixed measure or standard be set for men's apprehensions and judgments, than there can be for their statures and complexions.

But it may be thought, notwithstanding our little

differences in opinion, it is hard we cannot all agree in the common terms of worshipping God, and partaking of his sacraments, especially since we do all acknowledge that we do agree in more things than are precisely needful for the carrying us to heaven. Certain it is, nothing is more recommended, nothing is more pressed in the New Testament than this unity and communion among Christians. Nay, this very apostle who hath told us that there must be always heresies and divisions in the church, yet is so far from countenancing them, that he of all the other sacred writers is the most earnest and passionate in his exhortations to unity, and the most severe against those who cause dissensions, and break the peace of the church. O that God would be pleased to affect all those who profess his religion in the truth and purity of it with a deep and lively sense of these things; that they would heartily apply themselves to *follow after the things which make for peace*, (as our apostle speaks,) that they would *be likeminded, be of one accord, of one soul, so that the God of peace might be with them!* Inestimable indeed are the benefits that would accrue hereby both to the church and state, and to every one of us in particular. By this means we might the more assuredly expect the blessing of God upon the whole community; because hereby we should give the best evidence that we are the true *disciples of his Son*, in that *we love one another, and have peace one with another*. By this means we should remove the scandals that our divisions give to the enemies of our religion; and should disappoint them of the most considerable advantages they have against us for the making proselytes

to their party. And, lastly, by this means it is to be hoped that our fierce disputes and contentions about smaller things being laid aside, our zeal and fervour would be employed in things far more momentous ; in things wherein the honour of God and the salvation of our own souls is truly concerned ; that is to say, in seriously studying to live well, to be pious and just and sober in our conversation ; in adorning the doctrine which we profess by all the heavenly qualities and good fruit that so excellent a religion as ours doth naturally tend to produce in all the believers of it.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE QUEEN MARY, AUG. 30, 1691.

ACTS x. 4.

Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

TO put this text, and what I have to say upon it, into a due light, it will be necessary I should give some account of the history that is related in this chapter. It is the history of Cornelius's conversion to the Christian faith; and a very remarkable one it is.

This Cornelius was captain in the garrison which the Romans kept at Cæsarea for the better bridling and securing the Jews whom they had conquered. As for his birth, he was not an Israelite, but a Roman: as for his religion, he was not a Jew, but a Gentile or heathen; but yet such an heathen as had renounced the pagan idolatry, and owned the one supreme God, and worshipped that God in the way that natural religion taught, though not in the way of the Jews. Such men as these were by the Jews styled *proselytes of the gate*; and many such there were among them.

The character which is here given of him is, that he was *a devout man, and feared God with all his house, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God continually*, ver. 2. Here was a worthy heathen soldier indeed, and fit to be a pattern, not

only to all those of his profession amongst Christians, but also to all Christians of what profession soever. He did not only fear God himself, but he took care to possess all his family with the same sense of religion; and though he did not know the particular way in which God had declared he would be served, yet he did all that he could to recommend himself to his favour; and natural reason taught him, (as well as the law of the Jews, among whom he might converse,) that if any thing in the world could procure the divine acceptance, it must be fervent devotion towards God and hearty charity towards men; and therefore he laid himself out in these duties to the utmost of his power: and he was not mistaken in his belief; for such a man as this God would not suffer to perish, but, rather than he should want means of information about the right way to everlasting happiness, God would supply the defects by a miracle. And accordingly the next news we hear is, that when he was at his prayers, *about the ninth hour of the day*, (viz. our three o'clock in the afternoon, when they offered the evening sacrifice in the temple,) *an angel from heaven* appeared to him, and, calling him by his name, said in the words of my text, *Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. Now therefore send men to Joppa, and inquire for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do*, ver. 3—6. Upon this, Cornelius despatches away three messengers to Joppa, which was about thirty miles distant from Cæsarea, where he dwelt, ver. 6—34. On the next day they find St. Peter at his lodging: they acquaint him with their message, and the occasion of it. He, being

admonished by the Spirit of God to go with them, prepares for the journey, notwithstanding the doubts he had, whether he, being a Jew, could lawfully converse with the Gentiles, whom he looked upon as unclean; for God Almighty had removed that scruple by a vision which he had sent him on that very day. Accordingly on the third day he comes to Cornelius's house at Cæsarea. There he finds him and all his friends assembled together, waiting for the instruction that Peter would give them; and having had an account from Cornelius himself of what had happened to him, and of the reason why he was sent for, he then began to discourse to them about our Lord Jesus Christ, and the necessity of believing on him in order to salvation: the particulars of which sermon you have from the 34th verse to the 44th. And the effect that it had upon them was this, that as St. Peter was thus discoursing to them, *the Holy Ghost fell upon all the company*, ver. 44, just as he had done on the twelve apostles on the day of Pentecost; and they all became converts to the Christian religion, and were all baptized into it.

This is the sum of Cornelius's story, as it is related in this chapter; by which you may see how my text comes in, and what we are naturally led to observe from it. But there are such other useful things observable from this history, both with relation to our instruction and to the conduct of our lives, that I think I ought not so to confine myself to the text as to pass them over.

I shall therefore lay some of these observations before you, and shall in the last place consider what is observable from the words of the text.

1. The first observation I make from this history

is, that we have therein an illustrious instance of that important truth which it concerns all of us to remember, and often to think of, if we in good earnest design to lead such lives as we ought to do; and that is this, that God is not wanting to any man's sincere endeavours, but is willing and ready to assist every one with his grace, and to add further means and helps as there is need of them. Whoever will faithfully do that which he can do towards the serving God, though that which he can do be but little, such a man shall be carried further; and God will take care that at last he shall be put into such a condition that he may walk acceptably before him. Cornelius was a stranger to the true religion; but, so far as he knew his duty, he was honest and sincere in doing it. He knew by the light of nature that to pray to God and to give alms were probable means of gaining his favour; and therefore he accordingly took these methods. This now God accepted; and because of his sincerity in doing what he could, he vouchsafed his special grace and assistance, whereby he was enabled to know and to do those things which by nature he could not.

I wish this example of his was more considered and followed; we should not then have so many among us that would live so contentedly under the slavery of their sins and vices, upon a pretence that they have not grace and strength enough to overcome them. The great plea that men do generally make for the wickedness or carelessness of their lives is this, that really it is not in their power to live up to such a rate of holiness and virtue as the law of God obligeth them to: grace is in them too

weak, and their natural corruptions too strong, for their ever being in a capacity, without more assistance from God, to live strict and religious lives: conversion is the work of God, and cannot be wrought by a man's self; and therefore till God shall please to come upon them with an irresistible power of his holy Spirit they must be contented to live as they do, nay, they must unavoidably live so.

We do readily grant that without God's grace no man can do any thing; and we grant likewise, that it is very probable their circumstances may be such, that it is not morally possible, unless they had greater strength and more grace than they have, on a sudden to live as they ought to do; for their bad principles are really more powerful than their good ones: but yet in the mean time we must needs tell them that they are not mere stocks and stones. How much reason soever they have to complain of the infirmity or degeneracy of their natures, yet some things they can do towards the bettering of them: for instance, though they cannot on a sudden conquer the inward bent and inclination of their minds, so as to hate all sin, and to delight in virtue, yet they must needs confess that they have a power over their outward actions: they can as well (if they think it reasonable) direct their feet towards a church as to a house of gaming, or drinking, or lewdness: their eyes will serve them as well to look upon a Bible, or a serious discourse about religion, as to read a scurrilous and profane book: it is as much in their power, if they please, to yield their ears to the reasonable advice of their sober friends as to the mad harangues of the dissolute company they keep. These things they must needs acknow-

ledge they can do if they will: nay, and they can do more than this; for if they please they may give themselves time to consider and think of what they read, or what is said to them, or what their own experience or observation of things will suggest to their minds; and they can further, if they please, add to their consideration their prayers to Almighty God to direct them, to assist them, to strengthen them.

Now though we grant that all this without God's especial grace will not be effectual for their regeneration and conversion, yet we say, that if they will but do as much as this comes to, we can assure them that in time they shall have this especial grace that they now want. In the same proportion that they use and employ those gifts and powers which they at present have, God will increase and enlarge them; so that what now seems impossible to them shall in a little time appear possible; and what is then but possible shall in a little time more look very probable to be done; and what in these circumstances is but a bare probability shall in time be reduced to act; that is, they shall at last really live as they should do, and be in actual possession of that holiness and virtue, and that acceptance with God, which (as their present condition stands) they now despair of. And the truth of all this is confirmed to us by that memorable aphorism of our Saviour, which we find in his mouth at several times and upon several occasions: *To him that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have in abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath*, Matt. xxv. 29. The plain sense of which is no other than this: that every one

who well husbands and employs those talents that his Lord hath committed to him to trade with, (as to every person some talents are committed, to some persons more, and to others fewer,) every one who takes care to employ the gifts and powers he hath received from God to a good end, (be they at first never so mean and contemptible,) such a man shall have his stock increased: though he had but a very little at first, yet in proportion to his good management the bounty of his Lord shall be enlarged to him, till at last he shall have in abundance: but, on the contrary, every one who hides his talent in a napkin, that lets the powers that God hath given him lie idle and unemployed, that doth not use due care and industry for the improving of them, *even that which he hath shall be taken from him*; God will withdraw all that strength and grace, and all those means and assistances, that he did at first afford to him.

2. A second thing I take notice of in this history of Cornelius is, that when God had declared by the angel that he should have the gospel of salvation preached to him, there is a particular order given that he should send for Peter to undertake that office: *Send*, says he, *to Joppa, and call for one Simon, surnamed Peter: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do*, ver. 5, 6. Why must St. Peter, above all other of the apostles, be sent for to perform this work, and especially when he was at so great a distance from the place? That which I observe from hence is this, that this circumstance gives us a clear account of the true meaning of that promise which our Saviour made to St. Peter, upon his having made a public declaration that *Jesus was the Christ the Son of God: I say unto thee, That thou art Peter,*

and upon this rock will I build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, Matt. xvi. 18, 19. The papists make a world ado with this passage; and because the keys of the kingdom of heaven are here so particularly made over to St. Peter, they from hence conclude that he was made head of the church, and invested with a superiority and jurisdiction over the rest of the apostles, and consequently that his successors, the popes of Rome, have the supreme government of the Christian world. But if we will well consider this history of Cornelius, and join to it what is reported to us in the second chapter of the Acts, where the story is told us of St. Peter's preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, we shall be fully satisfied that it was quite another privilege than the headship of the catholic church that was promised to St. Peter in those words of our Saviour.

The kingdom of heaven (of which our Lord then promised him the keys) is undoubtedly to be understood of the kingdom of Christ in the world, viz. *that church* which Christ there said *he would build, and against which the gates of hell should not prevail.* By *the keys* of this kingdom must undoubtedly be understood the power of admitting persons into this church, and shutting them out of it; for to what other use doth a key serve but to open and shut a lock? Now these keys, though they were afterwards given to all the apostles, and to their successors, yet they are here promised to St. Peter in particular, and by name; and that, as we grant, for a reward of his so clear and noble a confession of Christ Jesus: and we make no doubt neither, but that in

this promise there was a particular privilege conferred upon him that was not upon the rest of the apostles : all this we grant. But now what was this privilege ? Was it that he should be the prince of the apostles, and his successors lords of the world ? No such matter. But only this, that St. Peter, for his generous acknowledgment of our Lord, should have the honour, by his preaching, to open the kingdom of heaven both to the Jews and to the Gentiles ; and accordingly we find that God made good this promise to him in both these instances : for to the Jews he opened the kingdom of heaven upon the day of Pentecost, that very day on which the Holy Ghost descended upon the apostles in a visible manner. Then did Peter, being filled with the Spirit, preach so effectually to the Jews there assembled, that 3000 of them were by that sermon brought into the church. And now here again, when God thinks fit that the doors of the kingdom of heaven should be opened to the Gentiles, who is to be employed upon that work, but the same St. Peter to whom our Lord had given the keys ? It is expressly ordered by the angel, that he, and no other, should be sent for, to preach the gospel to Cornelius, and that by his means the Gentiles should be made believers, and admitted into the church of Christ. And thus did St. Peter exercise his power of the keys in opening the kingdom of heaven both to the Jews and to the Gentiles : and thus did Christ, in a remarkable manner, make good that which he had so particularly promised him. But what is this to St. Peter's being head of the apostles, or the pope of Rome being the head of the catholic church ?

3. A third observation I make from this history

of Cornelius is this, that it is not enough to entitle any man to everlasting salvation that he practiseth the duties of natural religion, unless he also believe and embrace that religion which God has revealed by Jesus Christ, supposing he has opportunities of coming to the knowledge of it. Cornelius, of whom we are treating, was certainly, as far as natural religion could carry a man, as devout and honest a person, and as acceptable to God upon that account, as any we can imagine: and God did so far accept him, as to send an angel in pure kindness to him. But then this angel's message to him was not that God did very well approve of the way that he was in, and that he needed not trouble himself further; but this, that he had done well for a man in his circumstances, but if he would further recommend himself to God, and save his soul, he must send for one Peter from Joppa to instruct him in the Christian religion. But if now, upon his sending for Peter, and hearing what he had to say concerning Christ, he had still continued an unbeliever or a heathen, would God then have continued to accept him? No, by no means; he had shewed himself unworthy of God's favour, nor could he in the least expect the reward of an honest and religious man.

The inference I make from hence is this, that bare morality or honesty of life, without a right faith, will not save a man's soul, supposing that the man hath opportunities of coming to the knowledge of that right faith, as Cornelius here had. And this consideration I seriously address to all those among us who think it so indifferent a matter what religion or what faith they are of, provided they are but honest in their lives. They think that nothing

offends God but the open violation of those rules of morality which all the world must acknowledge themselves obliged to observe, and which it is scandalous not to observe. So that it is all one to a man's salvation whether he be Turk, or Jew, or heathen, or Christian, supposing he be but devout in his way, and have a regard in his dealings with others to the practice of that which is accounted fair, just, and honourable amongst men. But this is a grievous mistake, and of most pernicious consequence. It is certain, that wherever God has revealed his will, and declared upon what terms he will bestow salvation upon mankind, there all men are, under pain of damnation, obliged to embrace his revelation, and to believe and profess and practise according to the doctrines of such revelation. And it is certain likewise, that God hath fully and entirely revealed his will by Jesus Christ and his apostles in the New Testament; and so revealed it, as to exclude all men from the hopes of salvation, who, having opportunity of knowing Jesus Christ and his doctrines, do not believe in him. And therefore for any man to reject this method of God, and to say, I hope to be saved by another way than God hath appointed, is the extremest folly in the world: let every one therefore among us, as they would not be undone to all eternity, endeavour to instruct themselves aright in the true religion. All their pretended moral honesty will not in the least excuse them before God, if, when having means to find the truth, they do not embrace it, but continue infidels or misbelievers. If they had been born and bred in an heathen country, where they had no opportunity of coming to the knowledge of God's re-

vealed will, I know not how far their justice and temperance, and other good moral qualities, might avail them towards the procuring God's acceptance. But to live in a Christian country, nay, and to be baptized into Christ's religion, and yet to be pagans as to their notions and opinions; not to believe in Jesus Christ, but to think to please God in the way of the philosophers; there is nothing in the world to be said in their excuse for this. And they will at last find true what our Saviour hath pronounced, that *this is their condemnation*, (and a heavy one it will be,) *that light is come into the world, but they have loved darkness rather than light*, John iii. 19.

IV. The fourth observation I make upon this history is, that God, even in the extraordinary expressions of his kindness to sinners, in such cases where he is pleased to work a man's conversion in a miraculous way, yet hath such a regard to the standing, ordinary means of grace, as even in these cases to make use of them for bringing his work about. Rather than Cornelius should continue an infidel or stranger to the true religion, God was here pleased to send an angel from heaven to direct him to the right faith and belief; this was wholly extraordinary and miraculous. Now it is worthy of our observation, that this angel doth not take upon him to instruct Cornelius in the Christian religion, and to teach him what he was to believe concerning Jesus Christ, and what he was to practise if he would have eternal life; (though certainly he could very well and very easily have done it;) no: but for this he refers him to St. Peter, one of the standing public ministers of the gospel: *Send*, says he, *for one Simon, surnamed Peter; he shall instruct thee what thou shalt do*,

ver. 6. And thus it was also in the case of St. Paul, who was another remarkable instance of a miraculous and extraordinary conversion, and in many respects a greater instance than that we have now before us. For to him God did not send an angel, as he did to Cornelius, but our Lord Jesus Christ himself vouchsafed to appear to him, and that in the most glorious and astonishing manner that could be imagined. But what then? Did our Lord instruct him in the religion he was to believe? Did he make him a Christian? No, not at all: all that he did was to make him sensible of his error in opposing and persecuting the Christian faith; but for instruction and information in that faith he referred him to a public minister of the gospel. The scriptures tell us, that when St. Paul, *trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?* the answer that our Saviour gave him was not, I will tell thee; but this, *Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou shalt do,* Acts ix. 6. And accordingly he was no sooner come into the city, but Ananias, a Christian minister, was ordered to go and wait upon him, and to instruct him in the faith, and to make a Christian of him by baptism. These are illustrious expressions of the great value that God sets upon the ordinary, public means which he hath appointed in the church for the bringing men to holiness and happiness. And they are strong proofs of the obligation that is upon every person to make use of those means, let their circumstances be what they will. And therefore let every man, as he loves his soul, have a care of disusing them, have a care of withdrawing from them, and most of all have a care of despising them, upon a pretence that he is

above ordinances, and that he is too perfect a Christian to have need of such carnal administrations. He who thinks to be a good Christian, and to live acceptably to God merely by the strength and virtue of his own private devotions, or reading, or meditation, or upon the account of any secret inspiration, or impulses, or revelations; while in the meantime he makes no reckoning of God's standing ordinances, refuses his communion with the church, and lives without public prayers and sacraments, as thinking them empty formalities; such a man is horribly cheated and abused, and will find at last that he extremely wrongs his own soul; because he doth really put himself out of the common way of God's blessing. He will not be content to receive the divine influences through such conduits and channels as God hath ordered they should be conveyed through, but he will have a way of his own, which God hath nowhere promised that he will bless; but, on the contrary, has given us great reason to believe that he will not bless.

V. The fifth and last observation that I make from this history is, that which the text itself suggesteth to us; viz. the wonderful efficacy of prayers and alms to recommend us to the favour of God. Cornelius, as I have before said, was, without doubt, as to all the instances of his conversation, an honest and a good man, as far as he knew. But that which God principally takes notice of in him, and rewards him for, was his constant praying, and his great bounty and charity. Certain it is, the angel who was sent to him mentions no other of his virtues but these two: *Cornelius*, says he, *thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before*

God. Come up for a memorial before God! What is that? Why, it is a phrase just of the same importance as if he had said, Thy prayers and thine alms are an offering of a sweetsmelling savour unto God. Both the phrases are frequently used in the scripture, and they both mean the same thing. And indeed St. Peter, in the very beginning of his sermon, seems to take notice of these two virtues in Cornelius, (viz. devotion and charity,) as well as the angel; nay, and from hence draws a general conclusion: *I perceive, says he, that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him,* ver. 34, 35; that is to say, in every nation he that is heartily devout towards God and charitable towards men, (for *to work righteousness* is generally the scripture phrase to express the exercising of mercy and charity,) every such person is accepted of God. O that we would all seriously think of this, and practise it; if we did, we should certainly take the best course in the world to draw down the blessings of God upon us, both those of this world and of the other. Frequent and constant and devout prayer hath so many promises made to it, both in the Old Testament and in the New, that no man, who reads and believes the scriptures, can possibly doubt but that he who useth it shall certainly be heard in what he prays for; or if God do not grant his prayers in the particular instances that the man desires, yet he will so far grant them as to give him such things as are much better for him. And as for alms and charity, they are always described in scripture as the most acceptable sacrifice we can offer to God, and the most effectual means we can make use of for the

averting the punishment of our sins, and the procuring to us the mercies and blessings that we stand in need of: *To do good and to communicate*, says St. Paul, *forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*, Heb. xiii. 16. *And above all things*, says St. Peter, *put on charity: for charity shall cover a multitude of sins*, 1 Peter iv. 8. And the same advice doth the prophet Daniel give to Nebuchadnezzar for the covering the multitude of his sins; *Let my counsel*, says he, *O king, be acceptable to thee, break off thy sins by righteousness*, (that is, by giving alms, as I said before,) *and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity*, Dan. iv. 27. In short, such is the efficacy of constant prayer and charity, such a regard hath God to these two things, that whosoever doth seriously and conscientiously practise them, he will be accepted of God. If he be now a bad man, it will be impossible for him to continue so long; for God will so assist him, so strengthen him, so enlighten him, that he shall at last become a convert to true virtue and religion. And if he be a good man already, he takes the most effectual course in the world every day to grow better and better, so that he will *go from strength to strength*, till at last he will appear before God in the heavenly Sion.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE QUEEN MARY, 1692.

LUKE xv. 17, 18.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father.

THESE words are a part of our Saviour's famous parable of the prodigal son, in which many excellent things are delivered for the instruction and direction and encouragement of all penitent sinners.

Two things may be observed in these words: first, The miserable condition which the prodigal had brought himself into by his evil courses; *How many hired servants*, says he, *of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!*

Secondly, His resolution to return to his father, which followed upon the sense and consideration of this; *When he came to himself*, and considered this, he said, *I will arise and go to my father, &c.*

Under the first of these heads I shall make it my business to lay before you the true state of sinners and wicked men, who are the persons signified by the prodigal; and that both as to the steps by which they proceed in sin, and as to the wretched circumstances they bring themselves into thereby.

Under the second head I shall treat of the method by which sinners are brought to repentance; the

first step of which is a *coming to themselves*, as it is here expressed; that is, entering into a deep and serious consideration of their own state and concerns.

I. I begin with the prodigal's evil courses and misery.

Now that you may the better go along with me in this, it is fit I read to you the beginning of the parable, wherein a more particular account is given of the prodigal, both as to his sin and his misery. *A certain man, says our Lord, had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, &c.* ver. 11—16.

By the father here, who had two sons, to whom he gave portions out of his estate, we are to understand God Almighty, the great Father and Lord of the world, who, out of his abundance, doth bestow upon mankind, who are his offspring, their several portions. There is not one of his children but has a plentiful provision made for him, and variety of talents committed to him; which if he do but carefully manage and improve to the uses they were

given for, he will for ever preserve to himself the love and favour and kindness of his heavenly Father, and shall not fail both of living happily and comfortably here, and arriving also to a glorious state of immortality hereafter.

By the two sons here mentioned, between whom the father did divide the inheritance, we are to understand the two different sorts of men in the world. In the character of the eldest son are represented those men, who being blessed with a good temper and virtuous inclinations, and lighting under a careful education, have in a great measure preserved their innocence all their lives; have never wandered away from their Father's house; never gone astray in the paths of vice and wickedness; but, as the elder son saith of himself, have for many years served their heavenly Father without any wilful or habitual transgression of his commandment, ver. 29.

In the character of the younger son, who is the prodigal, are represented all those men who abuse the talents he hath committed to them, the benefits and helps and powers which he has bestowed upon them, to evil and mischievous purposes; who forsake the guidance and conduct of their heavenly Father, and betake themselves to a course of vice and sensuality: in a word, all sorts of men that have ever lived loosely and wickedly, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. These are the prodigals here mentioned; and it was for their encouragement to repent, and for their comfort if they do so, that this parable was framed by our Saviour.

Now in this account which is here given us of the prodigal's evil courses, and the consequences of them, we have a lively description of the state of sinners;

the methods and steps by which they proceed in sin, and the wretched condition they are thereby brought into; as will appear by comparing one with the other in the following particulars.

1. In the first place, the younger son having got his portion into his own hands, cares no longer to be in his father's house, thinking that there his liberty is too much abridged: but that he might the more effectually free himself from all sorts of check or restraint that the awe of his father might put upon him, he gets him into a foreign country. And thus doth it fare with sinners. The first step of their miscarriage is their estranging themselves from their heavenly Father. They think it too severe a discipline to live always under the apprehensions and awe of an invisible Being: and therefore they put the thoughts of God out of their heads as much as they can. They say unto him, with the profane people in Job, chap. xxi. 14. *Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* It is true, wherever they are, or whatever they do, God is present with them, whether they will or no; for there is no *going from his Spirit, no flying from his presence*, Psalm cxxxix. 7. But they may be properly enough said to depart from God, or to go afar off from him, while they do not consider or regard him; while they cease to maintain a constant sense of his justice and goodness and providence in their own minds; while they lay aside the care of his worship, and neglect their prayers and other holy exercises; and, in a word, live at that rate as if they were not apprehensive that there is an intelligent, omnipotent Being, who governs the world, and to whom they are accountable.

2. But to go on. The prodigal having got into another country, and so far enough from the sight of his father, allows himself all the liberties that his heart can desire ; lives viciously and profusely ; and so in a little time spends that stock which his father had given him. And so it is likewise with the sinner (who answers to him) when once he has cast off the fear of God, and cashiered the sense of religion out of his mind, (which is the best security of men's innocence, and the most effectual curb to keep them from going astray,) he presently flies out into all sorts of extravagancy and debauchery, as his temper and inclination does prompt him. He gives the reins to every appetite and to every passion, and takes his full swing of unlawful liberties and gratifications, according as his humour stands, or temptations do present themselves : and by this means he does in a little time waste those talents which God had committed to him. He besots his understanding, he depraves and corrupts his will, he weakens all his spiritual powers, he hardens his conscience, and thereby loses that quick apprehension and sense of good and evil that was put into his mind ; he squanders away his time and opportunities, he renders himself incapable of the benefits and advantages, which, if he be a person above the common rank, his birth and education, and circumstances in the world, gave him for the purposes of virtue. He loses the present assistances of the divine grace, and forfeits his title to it for the future : in a word, he embezzles and consumes all that stock, of what nature soever it was, which God bestowed upon him for the living reasonably and piously and happily either in this world or in the other.

3. But further; the prodigal having thus spent his portion by his profuse way of living, is now, by reason of the extremity of want that is fallen upon him, forced to become a servant. And this is the true condition of a sinner. The man who lives in the constant gratification of his lusts and appetites, of what nature soever they be, how free soever God made him, yet by thus weakening and abusing his higher powers, and not giving check to his inferior appetites, he is in a little time reduced to the abject condition of a servant or bondman. They who give themselves to commit sin *are the servants of sin*. He that is entangled in an habit of vice and wickedness is no longer at his own disposal, but his lusts do drag him and hurry him whithersoever they will: reason is dethroned, and the brutish part of the man doth rule and domineer. A rabble of wild passions, blind as chance itself, and violent and impetuous like the raging sea, do force this poor image of a man to do and to suffer things even oftentimes against his own sense and judgment. Though he hath so much reason left as in many cases to apprehend what is good and desirable, yet he hath no power to pursue it: and that evil which in his own conscience he disapproves of, such a slave he is to his appetites that he cannot forbear it. And as it is not to one lord only that he is a servant, but to a hundred; so, which makes the servitude still more intolerable, those several tyrants cannot agree among themselves, but impose laws upon the poor man contradictory to and inconsistent with one another. Lust commands one thing; ambition another; covetousness another; fear another: some of them the man must obey: and yet whichsoever of them he doth

obey, the rest are angry and displeased that themselves are not gratified. In one thing indeed they do all agree and conspire, (but it is still to make him the more wretched bondman,) viz. that they all promote and help forwards, in their several ways, the rule and interest of the great enemy of mankind, the Devil; for he indeed is the supreme lord of them all, and it is his work and drudgery chiefly that a man is doing all the while that he is pursuing the gratifications of his appetites. So that he may most properly be said to be the slave of the Devil, as well as his own lusts: which certainly is the most miserable bondage in the world. This is indeed the scripture account of this matter: *Whosoever*, says St. John, *committeth sin is of the Devil*, 1 Epist. iii. 8: and such persons are by St. Paul said to *be taken in the snare of the Devil, and to be led captive by him at his will* and pleasure, 2 Tim. ii. 26.

4. Again; the prodigal having thus of a freeman made himself a servant, see how wretchedly and basely he is used: he is put to the meanest and most contemptible employment, even to feed swine; and his diet was no better than his employment, for he is forced to eat of the husks that are given to the hogs.

But just thus are all they used who give themselves up to a vicious life. God designed them for noble employments, and so long as they preserved their innocence, and kept themselves under their Father's wing, and in his fear and obedience, they lived like the *children of the Most High*. Their work was suitable to their dignity, and becoming such excellent natures as God had given them. Their business was to contemplate God and his

works, and to exercise their reasons about the best and the noblest subjects; to sing praises to him who was the Author of their being, and to employ all their faculties in the most manly way; to love and to do good to all their fellow creatures, as they had opportunity, which is a godlike part; to govern their inferior appetites, and keep them constantly in subjection to the higher spirit that was in them; so that reason and the divine principle sat as empress in the soul, and all the sensitive passions moved orderly, regularly, and harmoniously, contributing with all cheerfulness their service and assistance to the man, for the carrying on the purposes of his noble function. This was the employment that our heavenly Father designed us for; and this is the employment that all virtuous persons, all they who live up to the dignity of their nature, do still follow. But O what a strange change is there made when a man departs from God, and yields up himself to the service of his lusts! what an infamous drudgery is he put upon! what mean, servile offices does he busy himself about! Certainly without a figure we may say, that the keeping of swine with the prodigal is a more truly honourable employment than that which sinners do choose for themselves. What can be more base and vile than for immortal souls, made for the fruition of the highest good, designed for the society of angels and God himself; to spend day after day, year after year, either in a dull, lethargic dopedness and stupidity, insensible of all things, and minding nothing but eating and sleeping and playing! or in scraping together a little heap of finely coloured dirt, which in a little time will moulder away, if not in their own hands, yet in the hands of those they leave it

to! or in wallowing in the filthy puddles of uncleanness and lust, which seldom fail to end in beggary, or shame, or rottenness! or in using their bodies as they do the vessels in their cellars, merely for the stowage of drink, till there be nothing but the shape of man remaining! or, lastly, like children eagerly blowing up and tossing a painted bubble, and striving to keep it above ground, which yet the least puff of wind makes to vanish into air! And yet these are the principal employments in which vicious men do busy themselves; these are the things they live for, and beyond which they have no thought or ambition. *Whatever is in the world* (as the apostle tells us, 1 John ii. 16.) is either *the lust of the flesh*, or *the lust of the eye*, or *the pride of life*. Sensual pleasures on one hand, and wealth on another, and popular applause or greatness on another, are the three great idols of the world; and whoever forsakes his God doth fall down and worship one or more of them. But are not these pitiful and contemptible deities for a rational, heaven-born soul to prostrate itself before? Is it not a shameful prostitution of our natures, to make those the great objects of our fears and of our hopes, of our love and of our joy, and, in a word, of all the designs and studies and pursuits of our lives? O the horrible blindness and degeneracy of mankind! What mean, despicable creatures do we make ourselves, when we forsake the paths of virtue and the commandments of our God! Alas! we cease to be men, and put ourselves upon the same level with the brutes; nay, which is yet worse, to use the prophet's expression, it may be truly said of us, that *we debase ourselves even to hell*, Isaiah lvii. 9.

And indeed suitable to the employment of a vicious man is the fare that he lives upon. As his course of life is not more honourable than the feeding of swine, so neither are his enjoyments better than those of the prodigal. His design is to live at ease, free from care and trouble ; to revel it in sensual delights, or to please himself with the outward splendor of his condition. But, alas ! he fails of his desires and expectations in all these things. Such is the contrivance of things, that it is impossible that a vicious man should live happily, or satisfy his own mind, let his circumstances be never so prosperous. Instead of solid, manly food, he only feeds upon husks, which neither gratify a human palate, nor afford him good nourishment. The mind of man is of that nature, that it can never be adequately filled and contented with any outward good, and least of all with those goods which are enjoyed in a vicious, unreasonable manner. Solomon, who made more experiments of this kind than any man perhaps upon earth, yet found at last, to his cost, that all those kinds of satisfactions were but mere *vanity and vexation of spirit*. All the pleasures which the sinner can receive from the most careful gratification of his sensual appetites, are but of the very same kind with those that his hogs are capable of as well as he ; only with this difference, that their enjoyments are more affecting, and less allayed with bitterness than his are. And can that be the happiness of a man, which the most stupid creature in the world has as great a share of as he himself ?

But besides, so far are our vicious gratifications from being pleasures, properly so called, that one may with truth enough affirm, that, take them alto-

gether, they have far more of uneasiness and trouble in them than of delight and satisfaction. All sorts of sinners, all who are under the power and dominion of their lusts, do know and feel this: the covetous, the proud, the envious, the glutton, the drunkard, the whoremonger, the ambitious, the revengeful; all these can testify out of their own sad experience, that when they have summed up the matter, the contentment they receive from the gratification of these several passions or appetites doth noways countervail the pains and restlessness, the disturbances and disappointments, and the manifold evil consequences both as to their bodies and souls, and good names and estates, which they suffer upon the account of them.

5. But to come to the last circumstance of the prodigal's condition, which the parable mentions: as coarse and as unagreeable fare as the husks were, yet he would have been glad to have satisfied his hunger even with these; but thus much was denied him. The text tells us, *he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat, but no man gave them unto him.* O wretched, unhappy man! he who before pampered himself with all sorts of delicacies, even to surfeiting, would now be glad of any sort of food in the world, even of husks, if he could get them. But so cruel is the master he serves, that he will not suffer him to fill his belly even with these.

Now in this also we have a lively representation of the state and condition of the spiritual prodigal: just thus doth the Devil treat all those who abandon God and virtue, to serve him and their own lusts. The best wages they have is only a little sensual

pleasure, or a little empty honour and greatness, which are but husks in comparison of the noble entertainments of religion and a good conscience. But even these they cannot have their fill of; for, alas! they are obnoxious to a thousand contingencies, which do either rob us of them, or put a period to all the delight and comfort we should receive by them. They are in a very little time either taken from the man, or the man from them. How can he be said to have his fill of wealth, who is either always craving and drudging for more, or anxiously fearful to lose what he hath? and who, notwithstanding the fulness of his barns, and the largeness of his possessions, and when he should *say to himself, Soul, eat, and drink, and be merry, for thou hast goods laid up for many years*, shall hear one of these two voices, *Thou fool, this night shall thy goods be taken from thee*, or, which is worse, *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be taken from thee, and then whose will all these things be?* Luke xii. 19, 20. And is there any greater hopes for the ambitious, that they shall have their fill of what their souls most desire? Alas! no. As easily may they make the wind to blow always in one quarter, or keep the sea from its constant ebbings and flowings, as they can secure to themselves the uncertain favour of great men, or the more uncertain breath of the people. And as for bodily pleasures, what do the most delicious of them signify, when the appetites to them are decayed and perished? as certainly they will be, when the vigour and briskness of a man's constitution wears off, and the powers of nature grow feeble and languid; which old age will undoubtedly bring to pass, but most frequently riots

and debauches do the business before that comes. But besides all this that I have said, how is it possible for a sinner to have his fill of any of these things? Or what comfort, what satisfaction can any of them afford him under a multitude of other unfortunate, afflicting circumstances, which he is unavoidably exposed to? Can he say, I will refresh myself with play, or wine, or music, when he lies languishing on a sick bed? Or will his heaps of treasure charm the gout, or stone, or cholic, that they shall put him to no pain? Or can he take any satisfaction from the cringes of the people, or the compliments of his friends, when his mind is ruffled with a great many secret and almost heart-breaking disappointments? Or, lastly, can all these things together yield any balm for the healing an ulcerated conscience, which, in the midst of the greatest affluence, the most luxurious entertainments, the most pleasing flatteries and applauses, makes the vicious man to tremble and look pale with the bitter reflections of his life past, and the dismal prospect he has of what is to come? Alas! in none of these cases can he purchase any quiet or repose to his own mind from the possession of any of these things, which the world calls great and happy. He is not at all the better for them, because he is out of the capacity of enjoying them: he feels no relish or gusto in them. And indeed in these circumstances it is all one whether he hath them or be without them. But supposing he was in a condition at all times as long as he lives uninterruptedly to fill and satisfy his appetites with these things, without the disturbance of sickness, of afflictions, of disappointments, and, which is worst of all, of a guilty con-

science, (which yet in the nature of things is impossible,) yet this misery will still attend him, he cannot enjoy these things always. The time is coming on apace when he must part with all these, his friends and comforters; the shadows of the evening will in a little time be stretched out upon him, and he must go into the regions of death; and then he must bid an everlasting farewell to the light of his eyes, to the desire of his soul, and to the idols of his life; and when this is a coming upon him, he will feel a sore want indeed. Then he will sadly say with the prodigal, *How many hired servants are there in my father's house that have bread enough*, but lo! *I perish with hunger!* He calls for his pleasures; but they are all departed, gone as a dream when one awaketh. He calls for his wealth, which, with so much anxiety and toil, he hath amassed together; but that is upon the wing, to fly to a new heir, that will perchance spend it more profusely than he got it sordidly: and all his gay feathers, in which he prided himself, and with which he endeavoured to soar above others, are now plucked from him, and he is left the most naked, despicable thing in the whole world. He hath nothing in the earth to turn himself to in this extremity; which way soever he casts his eyes, he sees nothing but what will fill him with horror. If he looks inwards, there all is hell and despair and confusion; there he finds a soul all over foul and leprous, oppressed with intolerable loads of the blackest guilt, and filled with the remembrance of a thousand instances of folly and baseness, and the ugliest ingratitude. If he looks about him, he sees all his friends and companions taking their last leave of him, and as they forsake him, his great

master, the Devil, with his frightful guard about him, (whose interest he hath so faithfully pursued, and whose drudgery he hath been doing all his life,) ready to claim their own, and seize upon the trembling soul as it parts from the body. Lastly, if he looks upwards, he sees an angry, offended God, whose laws he hath affronted, whose threatenings he hath despised, whose grace he hath turned into wantonness, and whose Holy Spirit he hath done despite to. He sees the Judge of the world summoning him to appear at his dreadful tribunal, to give an account of all the talents he hath misemployed, of all the precious time he hath mispent, of all the riots and debauches, all the frauds and unjust dealings, all the oaths and blasphemies, all the lewd intrigues, and, in a word, all the wicked designs, and profane words, and evil actions, of his whole life: and he seems to hear that terrible sentence sounding in his ears which will most certainly be pronounced upon him, and all such as he is, at the last day: *Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels*, Matt. xxv. 41. O, miserable state! O, dismal conclusion of a sinful life! But these are the natural fruits and consequences of forsaking God, and giving ourselves over to a course of vice and impiety. Nor is there any possibility of preventing or averting those consequences, unless, with the prodigal in the text, we do in time *come to ourselves*, and enter into a serious consideration of our ways, and upon that consideration *arise and go to our Father*.

II. Which leads me to the second head of my Discourse, which is the prodigal's return, as it is expressed in my text; of which I shall discourse very

briefly, because I have spent so much time upon the former.

The account that is given of the prodigal's return is this; that *when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and I perish with hunger! I will arise, and go to my father.* Here now, I say, we have a lively representation of the beginning and progress of repentance after a vicious life.

The prodigal being now pinched with extremity of want comes at last to himself: he begins to look about him, and to weigh and debate things seriously in his own mind. Whilst he was in the height of his prosperity he drove on furiously, not attending to any thing but the pursuit of his riots and debauches: he seemed to live without thinking, without any kind of reflection, either upon what was past or what was to come; he was as one that was dosed with wine, or delirious with a fever. Indeed he could not properly be said to be in his wits: but the miserable circumstances of his condition do at last awaken him, and bring him to his right senses; and then he begins to deliberate and make use of his reason. He then enters into a sad consideration of the happiness he hath lost, and the wretched condition he is in, and his own folly that brought him into it, and what it must end in, if there was not some speedy course taken, some present means used for the getting out of it. And this consideration puts him at least upon serious resolutions to apply himself to his father, as the only refuge that was left him in this world.

And thus it fares with every spiritual prodigal, who, after a vicious course of life, doth at last return

to his duty. The first step of his repentance is a serious sense of his condition. Till he begins to think and reflect and consider, there are no hopes of him ; but when through some good providence or other, (either a fit of sickness, or some other sharp affliction, or the arguments and entreaties of his friends, or some visible judgment of God inflicted upon the companions of his riotous courses, or the reading some good book, or the hearing some warm discourse ;) I say, when by any of these or such other methods (which God usually makes use of for the awakening of sinners) he is brought to a sense of his condition, begins to cool, and in good earnest to lay things to heart, and debate matters seriously with himself ; then he gives some appearances of a probability that he may in time rescue himself from the bondage of his lusts and the snares of the Devil, and become a convert to virtue and piety.

Here therefore all of us who have gone astray with the prodigal, but have not yet returned with him, here, I say, we are to lay the foundation of repentance, viz. in deep and serious consideration : and I would to God we would all do it presently, that we would stop our career a little time, and give ourselves leave to think ; that we would no longer blindly and furiously pursue our appetites, but open our eyes a little, and awake from our phrensy or our lethargy. O that we would at last come to ourselves, as the prodigal did, and resume the exercise of our long abandoned reason ! that we would do as David adviseth, *stand in awe, and commune with our own hearts, and in our chamber, and be still*, Ps. iv. 4 ; that we would sit down and sedately ponder with ourselves where we have all this while been,

and what we have been a doing, and whither all this tends; what will be the issue and conclusion of our riots and vicious courses if we persevere any longer in them! O if we were thus wise, if we did thus consider, I doubt not but, through the grace of God, we should in a very little time feel a mighty change in our own minds! and the next news would be, that we should imitate the prodigal in the second step he made to his repentance, viz. enter into most firm purposes and resolutions to quit our lewd courses, and to return to our heavenly Father, from whom we have so long and so unaccountably estranged ourselves.

Now to persuade all of you who are concerned thus to come to yourselves, and thus to enter into serious counsels and considerations about your own everlasting interests, is that which I design in what I have further to say at this time: and in order hereunto two things I desire to lay before you.

I. First of all, that it is this want of thinking and reflecting and coming to yourselves, that hath been the great occasion of all your past sins and follies.

II. That if you be once prevailed upon to come to yourselves, and seriously to apply your minds to the consideration of your own spiritual affairs, you cannot avoid the being brought to true repentance. Serious thinking, if it be practised and continued, will certainly have at last the same effect upon you that it had upon the prodigal; it will necessarily put you upon a hearty return to your Father.

Of these two things very briefly, and I have done.

1. It is the want of thinking and reflecting that is the great occasion of all the miscarriages of our

lives. It is not to be denied that our natures are bad enough, and our propensity to sin is very great and lamentable ; but yet I am confident it is not so much that which hurries us into so many sorts of follies and vices, as our rashness and inconsideration. We will not give ourselves liberty to think and reflect upon the consequences of our actions before we venture upon them, but blindly rush into them ; and hence comes the great degeneracy of human kind. We follow our present inclinations, and attend no further than just to what the object before us, or the circumstances we are engaged in, do prompt us to ; and thus we are at first betrayed into sin : and after we have done a sinful action once or twice or thrice, it goes down more glibly and easily afterward, and so by degrees it becomes familiar to us, till at last our sins grow habitual and customary, and then it is no easy matter to conquer them. The truth is, if it be examined, it will be found that want of consideration is the fountain of most of the miscarriages of mankind. What is it that makes any man an atheist, or at least to call in question the being of God and providence, but merely that he will not give himself leave to think ; will not be at the pains, with coolness and indifferency, to view the manifest effects and footsteps which every where, and in every thing, are to be discovered of an infinite power, wisdom, and goodness ? And the same thing we say of all those among us who are infidels or sceptics as to the Christian religion. If there be any man that is such, it is not because he wants evidence for the truth of the gospel, (for there is enough to convince the most curious inquirer upon earth,) but because he will not consider. He runs on in a road of

worldly business or sensuality, and cannot find either time or humour to enter into a serious and strict inquiry into things of this nature. If a man would but use his reason fairly, and calmly attend to the arguments that are or may be every day offered to his mind for the convincing him of the being of God, or the truth of Christ's religion, he could almost as soon not be a man, as be an atheist or an unbeliever. And thus, as to the particular immoralities of our lives, I would ask the most profligate, profane person, whether he thinks it would be possible for him to live in the practice of common oaths and imprecations, if every time that he had a temptation to swear, or damn himself or those about him, he did seriously consider that it is the dreadful name of God that he is now going to affront, who stands by and is a witness of his blasphemy, and that he is taking the ready course to damn himself in good earnest by this lewd abuse of his tongue.

Again ; what is it but mere sottishness and inconsideration that makes any man follow a trade of drunkenness and sensuality ? He could hardly turn himself into such a brute, if his mind was scarce ever so little attentive to the dismal consequences that he draws upon himself, both as to his business, his health, his parts, his estate, his posterity, to all these, as well as his soul, in following such a course of life.

In a word, it is stupidity and unthinkingness that undoes us all. We may pretend the unhappiness of our education, or the badness of our natures, or the force of temptations, or the irresistible baits of pleasure or gain, or the bewitching charms of company ; I say, we may pretend all these things in excuse for our careless or vicious lives ; but when all is done,

it is our own rashness and inconsideration that ought generally to bear the greatest blame. If we would but so order our affairs as to have the arguments and motives to religion seriously and frequently present to our minds, if we would vouchsafe them a place in our hearts, and meditate upon them, and digest them, it is impossible that a great many of us should live as we do. Let but a man ponder deeply and often upon the shortness and uncertainty of his life, the madness and the folly, the shame and uneasiness of all sorts of sin ; the joy, the peace, and the continual feast of innocency and a good conscience ; the serious desire that God hath that we should all be happy, his continual goodness expressed in a thousand instances, which should lead us to repentance ; the severe account that we must one day give of all our actions ; the unspeakably glorious and immortal life that we may attain to by holiness and virtue, and the everlasting punishment in hell-fire, with the Devil and his angels, that does certainly await all lewd, profane, ungodly, impenitent sinners : I say, let but a man seriously and constantly fix his thoughts upon these things, and I dare challenge him to be a bad man, if he can ; I dare challenge him to live in whoredom or drunkenness, or in any other wicked course, if he can.

2. And this leads me to the other thing I have to represent about this business, and with it I conclude ; viz. that wherever serious thinking and reflection is practised and continued, it never fails to produce reformation in the man that useth it.

And here I cannot but take notice of one thing. It is very observable that when Christianity was first preached by our Saviour, it had strange visible effects

upon the hearts and lives of men. In those days, no sooner had a man taken upon him the profession of the gospel, but he became a good man, a holy liver, a mortifier of all his carnal lusts and appetites; he became dead to the world, and all the vanities of it, despised all earthly pleasures and glories, and was ready to lay down his life for his Lord and Master whenever he was called to it. It was then a strange uncouth thing to hear of a lewd, vicious, debauched Christian.

But now in these days, though we have the same religion, though the same doctrines be preached, the same arguments enforced, the same assistances of God's grace and Spirit afforded, yet we see there are none, or but very few of these effects amongst us: Christianity looks like another thing. We can now believe the gospel, and communicate with the church in all her offices, and hear our sins reproved, and our duty told us, and all the glorious promises of Christ displayed to us, and the dreadful threatenings of God denounced against us, and yet we are still the same persons that we were before. We continue as vain and as loose in our conversation as ever, as uncharitable and worldly-minded, as wrathful and peevish and censorious, as if we were still in the darkness of heathenism, and the gospel had never been preached to us. What now is the reason of this strange disparity between the effects of the gospel then and those now? Why truly the greatest reason seems to be this, that the Christians in those former times did seriously consider their religion, and weigh its arguments and motives, but we do not. They took up their Christianity by choice, and we by chance or education. They, at their first entrance upon the

profession of the gospel, gave themselves the trouble of a diligent inquiry into the doctrines and duties of it, and the evidences for it; they considered the goodness and reasonableness of the precepts, the greatness of the promises, and the mighty encouragements to holiness and virtue it laid upon mankind: and all these things they thought so long upon, till they found themselves transformed into the spirit and temper of Jesus the author of it; till they found in themselves such fruits and effects as so excellent a religion ought in reason to produce: and such fruits and effects will always be produced where the same consideration and application of mind is used.

But further, to shew the mighty influence that serious consideration hath upon a good life, I ought also to take notice of this, that even in our days, as barren and ineffectual as our religion proves among us, as hardened and as insensible as we seem to be, yet there is none of us, but if we are at any time, upon any occasion, brought to a serious consideration of our own ways, and of the concernments of our souls, we presently find ourselves changed; we are in a manner another sort of men. We have new thoughts, new desires, new purposes, and resolutions; and if that thinking and consideration did continue, we should, without doubt, change our lives in deed, as well as we do then in purpose. This we see frequently in sick persons; they who have been the most careless of men, they who have most despised religion, who have been proof against all the arguments of it while they were in health, yet when they come to their sick beds, and begin to be awakened by the apprehension of death into a serious consideration of their own state, how strangely are they

affected ! how much do they repent of their former actions ! how absolutely necessary doth virtue and a holy life then appear to them ! how full are they of strong resolutions to amend their ways, if ever God restore them to health again ! how earnestly do they ask God's pardon for what is past, and pray for his grace for the future !

What now is the reason of all this ? there was the same difference between virtue and vice before : they had the same arguments to fly the one, and to pursue the other before : only they now deeply consider them, and apply them to their own hearts ; which before they did not. They before lived at random ; but now, thinking it no time to fool or trifle any longer, they begin to entertain more serious counsels concerning themselves.

And thus will it always be with all persons in all circumstances. If they can once be brought seriously to reflect and consider, there is a good step made towards their repentance ; and, if they continue their considerations, there is no doubt but they will at last become truly virtuous and holy persons.

O that we would now begin to apply our minds seriously to our spiritual concernments, and entertain the same thoughts that we shall be sure to have when we come to die ! O what a world of trouble, care, and consideration would it save us, which will certainly some time or other come upon us ! We cannot always live without thinking : a time will come, when we shall consider and reflect, whether we will or no : a time will come, when we shall not be able to divert our thoughts from those things which we are now so loath to think upon ; and perhaps it may be then too late. O, happy they who

do, with the prodigal, come to themselves in time, before their Father's mercies be shut up against them! do with him so consider their ways, as to take up the same resolution that he did, *I will arise, &c.*

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE KING WILLIAM, 1701.

MATTHEW xviii. 7.

Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh!

OUR Saviour in the verse before had been saying, that *whosoever should offend one of these little ones that believe in him, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea*, ver. 6; and in the next words he adds what I have now read, *Woe unto the world, &c.* We may gather from the former verse what a grievous thing it is in God's account to offend our brethren, even the meanest of them; and we may gather from the latter verse, that yet, notwithstanding, this is a thing that is like to be frequently practised in the world, men will be giving offence to others, though *woe be to the man by whom the offence cometh!* Since therefore this sin of offending our brethren is declared to be so great, and withal so common, I think it concerns all of us to be rightly instructed wherein it doth consist, that so we may not, through our mistakes and false notions about it, either be troubled in our minds for having committed it when we have not, or be encouraged from the common practice of the

world to do such actions as will really bring us under the guilt of it.

The Greek word which we here translate *offences* is σκάνδαλα, and from hence σκανδαλίζειν, *to offend*, and σκανδαλίζεσθαι, *to be offended*. These words are used in the New Testament above forty times, and, I believe, always in the same sense. But the English words by which we render them, viz. *offences*, and *to offend*, and *to be offended*, as they are used by us in common speech, do by no means give us a true idea of what is meant by those Greek words in the sacred writers; nor would it much mend the matter, if instead of offences we would say *scandals*, and instead of offending we should say *scandalizing*, and instead of being offended we should say *being scandalized*; for though these be English words now, and of the very same sound with the Greek, and are indeed taken from them, yet as we commonly apply them they have a quite different sense in our language from what those terms have in scripture. This word σκάνδαλον, (upon which the two other depend,) when it is taken in its proper sense, signifies one of these two things, viz. either *a trap* or *a snare* to catch one in, or *a block* or *a stone* that is laid in the way, at which people in the dark are apt to stumble and fall. In the first signification it is used in the sixty-ninth Psalm, ver. 22. *Let their table be made a snare to them*; where in the Greek it is, *Let their table be made a scandal*: and in another Psalm, *They set scandals in my way*, where our English rightly renders, *They set traps in my way*. In the other signification it is taken in the nineteenth of Leviticus, ver. 14. *Thou shalt not put a scandal before the blind*;

that is, as we have translated it, *Thou shalt not put a stumblingblock before the blind*. And several such instances are to be given.

This now being the primary sense of the word *scandal*, when it is used properly and without a figure, we may easily from hence gather what the true notion of it is when it is used metaphorically, or in a moral signification, as it is here in my text, and in all the others, where it is translated by the word *offence*; for what a trap or a snare is to a beast, or what a stumblingblock in the way is to one that is blind, or to one who walketh in the dark, the same thing that which we call *an offence* is to a man's soul, viz. any thing by which a man's soul is endangered, any thing that occasions his fall into sin, any thing whereby he is hindered and discouraged from doing what he ought to do, or drawn away to do that which he ought not to do. In a word, an offence, such as my text speaks of, is any impediment that a man meets with in the way of religion and godliness.

Taking now this along in our minds, we have an easy account not only of the text I am now upon, but of all the others where this word is used; but I confine myself at this time to my text: *Whosoever, saith our Saviour, shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck*, ver. 6. *Offend one of these little ones!* What is that? Whosoever shall lay any snares or stumblingblocks before them, whereby they are diverted from their Christian profession, or made to depart from that good way in which they are entered; whosoever shall thus seduce the meanest Christian, whether it be by terror or by allure-

ment, woe be to that man, he hath contracted an horrid guilt. And then come in the words of my text, *Woe be to the world because of offences ! for it must needs be that offences come ; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh !* that is, as if our Saviour had said, Mankind is in a dangerous condition upon account of the many temptations they are exposed to in the way of godliness. The variety of occasions they will meet with in the world either to keep them from a holy and Christian life, or to make them depart from it after they have engaged in it. It is indeed unavoidable but that such temptations and occasions to sin will be continually thrown in their way ; but let them look to it who are the authors or the causes of them, for they have much to answer for to Almighty God upon account thereof.

Having thus given you the plain sense of my text, I desire, before I enter further into the points contained in it, to make two or three reflections upon what I have already said concerning the notion of scandals or offences.

1. And first of all, it appears that the common opinion which people among us have taken up about giving offence hath no ground or foundation in the holy scripture ; men judging of this matter by the mere sound of the English word, usually run away with this, that to offend, or to give an offence to another, is to do any thing that may grieve or displease him, or make him angry with us ; and upon that account some take themselves to be obliged in conscience to avoid all those things which some well-meaning persons they converse with do not like or approve of, as thinking that every action they do,

which is disagreeable to their humours, is really a giving offence to them in a sense that our Saviour here forbids. I do readily grant, that no man should willingly or causelessly do any action at which another may be grieved or displeased; civility and good manners will oblige us to it, or, if that do not, I am sure Christian charity will. But then, I say, it is one thing to grieve or displease our brother, and another thing to scandalize him, or to give him offence; for, as I have shewn, we then only do this latter when we lay snares and temptations before him that may endanger his virtue, and occasion his falling into sin. The truth is, if this was the sin of giving scandal, to act contrary to the humours and sentiments of others, it would be impossible for any man to live so as not to be almost daily guilty of it; for there are few of the common actions that a man doth so clear and unexceptionable, but that there are those to be met with who will censure and condemn them, and be angry with the man that doth them.

2. Another thing we may collect from this account we have been giving of scandals and offences is this, that they who are most apt to complain of their being scandalized or offended with some things which they see others do, are really least in danger of being so in the true sense of the word; or, if they be indeed scandalized or offended by those things, they of all others deserve the least compassion: for a scandal or an offence being nothing else but a stumblingblock laid before one to make him fall, or a snare put in his way to entrap him in a sin, for any man to say that he is scandalized with this or the other action which he sees his neighbour do, is

to suppose that he is sensible that that action is a block in his way, and may occasion his fall; that he is aware that it is a great temptation to him to sin against God. Now, in this case, I say, he either is not scandalized, or, if he be, he is extremely to be blamed for it; for if he resists the temptation, and keeps close to his duty, notwithstanding this occasion of sinning, then he is not scandalized or offended because he avoids the offence. On the other side, if he close with the temptation, knowing it as he doth, and be ensnared in the sin, having his eyes thus opened to see the danger, what pity doth he deserve? he is to be accounted a wilful, presumptuous transgressor.

3. Another thing which I observe from this doctrine of offences is this, that we are oftentimes in as much danger of scandalizing and offending others, by pleasing them, and complying with their humours, as by doing such things as are offensive and distasteful to them. Thus, for instance, to give a man money when we are morally certain that he will spend it in such ways as will either be hurtful to himself or others; or to set strong drink before a man who has already drunk beyond the pitch of temperance; in both these cases the humours of the men are pleased and gratified; but yet, in truth, we do in both these instances really scandalize or offend them, in the scripture sense of the word; because we do directly lay a snare and temptation before them to commit sin: whereas, if we had been less kind in the one case, and less civil in the other, though we had displeased them by being so, we had avoided the giving scandal, and done more agreeably to our duty: and thus it is in all cases where a man

lies under any criminal mistake, or goes on in the pursuit of any vicious inclination or evil custom. The danger here of offending them doth not lie in opposing their humours or thwarting them in these ways, or by shewing by our words and actions how much we disapprove of them, but by complying with them, and by our silence or our countenance encouraging them in their sinful prejudices or vicious courses.

4. Another thing to be taken notice of upon this occasion is this, that a man cannot be guilty of offending his brother, in the scripture sense of the word, so long as he is doing his duty. Or if ever it does happen that any one is drawn or led to commit a sin by seeing another do an action that he is really bound to do, in that case the sin lies wholly at his own door, nor hath that other man any thing to answer for it: here is indeed an offence taken, but here is none given. The one man is really scandalized and offended, but the other man, not being the cause of it, is not to be blamed for it; and the reason of this is evident. No man can be obliged to contradictions, and therefore all the parts of a man's duty must be consistent one with another; and if so, then it cannot be supposed that at the same time a man is obeying a law of God he should at the same time sin against his neighbour, as he really must do, if by any action of his that was a duty he could give offence, or lay a stumblingblock before his neighbour. The use that I make of this is, that we are not to forbear any action which either the laws of God, or the laws of man, whether ecclesiastical or civil, have obliged us to, (so long as those laws of man are not inconsistent with the laws of

God,) for fear of giving offence to others ; for if any be scandalized at our performing our duty, (as certainly it is every man's duty to obey God and his lawful superiors,) it is their fault, and none of ours.

5. There is one thing more that is fit to be added, and then, I think, we have taken in all the material difficulties that can happen in this business, of giving offence to our brethren ; and that is this, that though we can give no scandal or offence to any by any action that it is our duty to do, yet it may sometimes happen that we may give offence to others by an indiscreet use of our liberty in things which are otherwise lawful. My meaning is this : a direct tempting of men to sin, or the doing any ill thing by which others may be encouraged to sin ; these are not the only instances in which a man may offend his brethren, (though indeed these are the most notorious and most common,) but a man may give offence also in the forbidden sense, when he doth some action lawful in itself to be done, and perhaps likewise done by him with an innocent design, but which he foresees may probably be an inducement or an occasion to draw others into some sin ; I say, even this is a giving offence, and laying a stumblingblock before our brethren. It is certain that every man is bound, in charity to his brother's soul, thus far to deny himself, viz. as to forbear those actions which otherwise he might lawfully do, when the case so happens that those actions, if they be done, will in all probability be a snare to others to do something that they ought not to do. And this is the very case about which St. Paul is so large in the fourteenth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, and eighth and tenth chapters of the First Epistle to

the Corinthians, where he treats of this argument. The sum of his discourse of scandals in these Epistles comes to this; that in matters purely indifferent, which are neither tied upon us by the laws of God nor man, but it is perfectly left at our liberty whether we will act or not act, in all these cases we should have so much regard to the ignorance and infirmities and prejudices of those we converse with, as rather to forbear the practice of those things which are otherwise lawful, and we may freely do, than by using our liberty in such things, to give encouragement to other men's sins, or to be a blameable occasion of another man's fall.

Having thus far treated of the nature of scandals and offences, in order to the rectifying some popular misapprehensions about them, I proceed now to say a little (and it shall be but a little) to those points which the text I am upon doth more particularly suggest to our consideration with relation to this matter.

Woe unto the world, says our Saviour, because of offences! it must needs be that offences come; but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh!

Three things here our Saviour declares unto us :

I. The dangers and sad consequences that scandals or offences do bring upon mankind: *Woe unto the world because of offences!*

II. The necessity and unavoidableness of them: *it must needs be that offences come.*

III. The heinous guilt and punishment of those who are the authors of them: *but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh!*

Of these three points very briefly.

1. We have here set forth the danger and sad

consequences that offences bring upon mankind; *Woe*, &c. And indeed this woe that our Lord pronounced hath been too sadly made good in all ages from his time to this. Mankind has ever been, and are still, in a woeful, deplorable condition, through the manifold offences and scandals that have been thrown in their way. To pass by former times, and only to speak of our own. If any man looks abroad into the world, he cannot but be sensible that the dangers to which men are exposed upon this account are infinite, and the consequences of them very fatal to abundance of people. What through the atheism and the infidelity and the no-religion of men on one hand, and through the scepticism and heresies and false religion of many on the other; what through the multitude of ill examples that are every day given, and the manifold enticements to vice and debauchery that all places do abound with; what through the persuasions and allurements of insinuating companions, and the frowns and discouragements of another sort, who *think it strange*, as the apostle speaks, *if we run not with them into the same excess of riot*, 1 Peter iv. 4; I say, what through these and other scandals, (for all these are most properly scandals and stumbling-blocks) which persons of all ages and sexes and ranks do meet with, the world is at that pass that really it is a most hazardous thing to live in it: nor is there any condition or state of life so safe, but that one is in danger of making shipwreck of his virtue; and how well soever one is inclined, he no sooner comes abroad into the world, but he runs a great risk of being corrupted either in his principles or his morals, either of becoming a misbeliever or an

unbeliever, or a vicious liver. And indeed we cannot wonder at it, when we consider how natural a thing it is for a man to get the same opinions and sentiments of things which they have with whom he converseth, and how hard to resist the importunity of friends, or to stand out against the violence of great temptations; how difficult not to be obliged by kindness, or frightened with discouragements; what charms there are in agreeable conversation, and how uneasy a life it is to be always wrestling against a torrent of examples, especially when pleasure, or interest, or the favour of great men do plead on their side: these things being considered, it is no wonder that the temptations and stumblingblocks, which are daily thrown before men in the way of religion and virtue, should have such a direful influence and success upon their minds and manners as they have, and that upon the account thereof so many are perverted from the good way they were in, and so many hardened in false principles and vicious courses.

The use I would make of this point at present (though a great many others might be made) is this: since the offences that happen in the world render it so dangerous a place, it will highly concern all those who have the charge of others committed to them to be wonderfully careful, both to keep them from these offences, and to arm and fortify their minds against them. Though there be no certain infallible fence against the mischiefs of the scandals of this world, yet the best and surest fence there is is a good education, and being seasoned with virtuous principles in our tender years. It behoves therefore all parents, and others who have young

people in their care, to look diligently to this, to see that they be trained up in the fear of God, to set good examples before them of sobriety and honesty and good nature, and a religious conversation; to possess their minds with a hearty and deep sense of the difference between good and evil, the ways of God and the ways of sin, and the indispensable obligation that is upon them both, in order to their living happily here and hereafter, to pursue the one and avoid the other; to instruct them in the principles of the true religion, and to furnish them with arguments both against error and vice: and, lastly, when there is a necessity of sending them abroad from under their own wing, to make such provisions for them, and to dispose them into such circumstances of living, as that they may both know how to spend their time innocently and usefully, and withal be obnoxious to as few dangers and temptations as their condition will admit. These endeavours, together with our hearty prayers to God for his blessing upon them, are the most certain expedients to secure our children from the horrible mischiefs and inconveniences that the multitude of scandals bring upon the world. And indeed I might appeal to experience for the truth of this. Persons who have this care taken of their education do not often miscarry; and though it may now and then happen to be the misfortune of some of them to be overborne by temptations, nay, and perhaps for some time of their lives to give themselves a loose to a course of vice and immorality, yet generally the good principles wherewith their minds were seasoned in their youth, do, through God's grace, some time or other operate, and have their due effect at last.

2. The second thing that our Saviour here declares to us is, the unavoidableness of those scandals among mankind : *it must needs be*, &c. The Greek word is ἀνάγκη γάρ ἐστι, *there is a necessity for it*. St. Luke expresses it by ἀδύνατόν ἐστι, *it is impossible but offences will come*, Luke xvii. 1. ἀνένδεκτόν ἐστι. And indeed the reason is very plain why they must come ; for so long as there is a multitude of evil angels about us, who malign the welfare of mankind, and make it their business to sow tares where Christ has sown his good seed ; and so long as there are men in the world who do carry on the interests of that kingdom of darkness, either by teaching doctrines which are contrary to Christian truth, or by promoting practices contrary to Christian holiness : in a word, so long as God is pleased to permit in the world either the temptations of the Devil, or the follies and sins of mankind, so long it *must needs be that offences will come*.

But some may say, is it not a great flaw in the divine Providence that he suffers these things? Doth it not seem very incongruous and unbecoming that care which we all believe God takes of mankind, to expose them thus to scandals and stumblingblocks which he knows to be so dangerous, and of such fatal consequence to many of them? I answer, No, it doth not : there is nothing in this proceeding but what suits very well with all God's attributes. If he has made men free agents, and given them such natures as they may either do well or do ill, then it is but reasonable that he should suffer them to act according to those natures ; and if he do so suffer them, then all those effects we have spoken of will follow. God is noways the author of those scandals,

and therefore they are not in any wise to be charged upon him: but men, by abusing their liberty, and yielding to the temptations of the Devil, are the causes of them. Nor is it reasonable that God should interpose his omnipotence for the putting a stop to them, because that would be to deal with mankind in a way contrary to their own natures, and to put a force upon free agents: but then here appears the wisdom and goodness of divine Providence; though God does not hinder these things, yet he so orders the matter that excellent ends are served by them. He, who brings light out of darkness, can and doth bring a great deal of good to mankind by these grievous evils: for by these scandals and offences which happen in the world, 1. the reality and sincerity of men's pretensions to religion are effectually tried; 2. the graces and virtues of the good are hereby extremely improved; and, lastly, the consequence of that is a vast increase of glory to them in the day when our Lord Jesus shall come to judge the world.

The use I make of this point is this: since *it must needs be that offences come*; since, according to the course of this world, there will be always so many temptations and stumblingblocks laid before men in the way of virtue and godliness; let no man be surprised when he meets with them, or stand amazed, as if some strange and unusual thing had happened unto him. There is nobody must think or expect to pass his time in this world in so profound an ease and undisturbedness, but that his virtue will be exposed to frequent, nay, and sometimes to difficult trials. What therefore has every one to do but to prepare himself for them; to put his affairs

in such a posture, as that he may be in a readiness to encounter them. The offences of this world do really make the life of a Christian to be a constant warfare, and accordingly it is often so styled in the New Testament; and, therefore, whosoever takes upon him that life, it will concern him to have his eyes open, and always to stand upon his guard; to look every day for assaults of one kind or other, and accordingly to be prepared for them. But how is that to be done? Why, by being watchful over our own actions, and considering well beforehand what business or what company we engage in; by fortifying our minds with good resolutions, and calling in to our assistance all those motives and arguments to virtue and holiness that the religion of our Lord will furnish us with; and by frequently and heartily devoting ourselves to the service of our master Christ, and earnestly imploring his continual assistance and direction and support in all our undertakings. Now, if we do thus take care to provide ourselves against the offences that may happen, we need not be troubled or frightened when they come; for to a man thus armed and fortified they will do no harm, but a great deal of good, (as I said before,) of what nature or kind soever they be. If we do our parts towards securing our innocency, God undoubtedly will not fail to do his; and, as terrible and dangerous a place as the world is, upon account of the multitude of scandals that are therein, we shall have a safe and prosperous, though not always an easy passage through it. Let us therefore be of good comfort under whatever trials and temptations God in his providence may think fit to expose us to. If we do not forsake ourselves, he will never forsake us;

we have his word for it, that *he will never suffer us to be tempted above what we are able*; and if ever he suffers a great and an unusual temptation to come upon us, why, in that case, *he will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it*, 1 Cor. x. 13.

3. The last thing observable in my text is, the heinous guilt and punishment of those who are the authors of scandals and offences: *Woe be to that man*, &c. What a terrible woe this is, and what a dreadful punishment it doth involve in it, appears from what our Lord had said in the verse before: *Verily I say unto you, &c. it were better for that man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea*. The meaning of which is, he who shall, either by word or action, discourage the very meanest of Christ's disciples from going on in the Christian profession and practice, shall tempt him, or seduce him from his duty, and draw him into sin, it is better for that man that he should be hurled to the bottom of the sea, never to rise again. What a lively, emphatical description have we here of the dismal condition of all those by whose means scandals and offences come! And it is observable, that this is declared concerning such a man as shall offend any one, even of the meanest and weakest of all those who profess the Christian religion; and if so, how unexpressibly great is their guilt, and how sad shall be their punishment, who have not only offended one, but many hundreds, by debauching their principles or morals; by being advisers, or tempters, or occasions to them of sin, always supposing, unless they do timely repent of this their wickedness, and make it their business

from henceforward to live entirely to God, and to endeavour as much the promoting the interests of virtue and religion, as they did before of sin and the Devil.

The use that I make of this point is, that all of us, as we love our souls, would have a care of being the authors of offences, or of setting temptations before others of sinning against God. Let us have a care of having any hand in the sins of others, either by advising them or encouraging them; let us have a care in all our conversation of tempting or enticing any one in any way to do that which he ought not to do, as, God knows, this is a fault too common in most companies, especially in the business of drinking; and I might name other instances. Let us have a care never to say or do any thing that may discourage any man in the practice of that which is good; that we do not set an ill example before those we converse with, and by that means lay a stumblingblock in their way, to make them go and do likewise. This case doth highly concern all of us, in whatever circumstances we are in; but it doth more especially concern those who are placed in any public office or station, such as magistrates; or in any degree of eminence above others, as the nobility and gentry among us. The influence of the lives and actions of all these sort of persons do extend to a great many; and the encouragement they give to looseness and immorality, either by their countenance or by their example, is of infinite evil consequence to all about them, nay, to the whole nation; for they are the patterns which meaner people propose to themselves to frame their lives by; and if any sort of vice or sin be fashionable among them,

it will of necessity, by degrees, get reputation among the multitude; and therefore they, above all others, are concerned in this point of not giving offence; to take care both of their practice and of their principles; for, if either of these be naught, the scandals that will ensue thereupon are certain and inevitable.

And this give me leave to say, and I conclude with it, that until the men of quality among us, they who have estates and fortunes, they who have dignity and authority, do seriously set themselves to live sober and strict and religious lives; to shew an esteem and veneration to God and his service; to discourage vice and profaneness, and to countenance virtue and goodness in all about them, by setting examples of temperance, chastity, and devotion, there is little hope that our nation will ever be recovered from that deluge of atheism and irreligion and universal corruption of manners which have overspread it, and which all sensible men too sadly and justly complain of.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE QUEEN ANNE, 1703-4.

JONAH iii. 5.

The people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast.

WE have in this short prophecy one of the most wonderful and remarkable relations that is almost to be met with in any history. God it seems was highly displeased with the wickedness of the people of Nineveh, (chap. i. 2.) which at that time was one of the greatest cities in the world, and the capital of the Assyrian empire. And thereupon he orders Jonah, one of the prophets among the Jews, (within the compass of which nation his prophets and his church was then contained,) to go and preach to them, and to tell them peremptorily that within a very little while their whole city should be destroyed. Jonah, whether he thought his message would not be believed, or whether he thought that God, upon the Ninevites' repentance, might alter his purpose, and so he should appear a false prophet; or whether he looked upon this sending of him to a heathen people to be an ill omen to his own nation, the Jews, of God's casting them off, and taking the Gentiles into their place; Jonah, (ver. 3.) I say, was very unwilling to undertake this employment, and did all that ever he could to decline it. Accordingly, instead of going to Nineveh, as God had directed him, he took

shipping for Tarshish. But this would not do; God Almighty found him out, (ver. 4—15.) and sent such a storm upon the sea, that there was no way left of saving the ship, wherein he was, from wreck, but *by casting him into the sea*: which being once done, *the tempest ceased, and there was a great calm*. As for Jonah, *God provided a whale* to receive him after he *was cast into the deep*, and *after three days to expose him again upon the dry land*, ver. 17.

This judgment upon Jonah, and his miraculous preservation after it, as it rendered the mind of the prophet pliable and obedient to God's will, so did it prove, in all probability, his letter of credence from God to the Ninevites. For after this to Nineveh Jonah comes, chap. iii. 3; and there, as God had ordered him, he denounceth God's judgments against them, positively declaring, *that within forty days Nineveh should be destroyed*, ver. 4. One would wonder that so strange a message should meet with any belief in a pagan city, especially, as far as we can gather from the story, there being then no appearance of any immediate danger that could give them apprehensions of such a sudden destruction. But God never sends an embassy to mankind but he some way or other takes care to give testimony to the ambassador. Either Jonah wrought some extraordinary works to evidence the truth of his mission from God, or (as it is very likely) several of those merchants who had been witnesses of the whole strange adventure that had befallen him were there upon the spot to attest it, and so gain credit to his preaching. However, the event that his preaching had was remarkable, and what was then

done by the king of Nineveh and his people, upon the preaching of Jonah, ought to be a pattern to all succeeding generations to follow whenever they are alarmed by the approaching judgments of God.

No sooner had Jonah preached that Nineveh should be destroyed, but *the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast*; or, as it is expressed in the following verses, a day of fasting and humiliation was *proclaimed throughout Nineveh by order of the king and his nobles*, ver. 7. And the solemnity of this fast was extraordinary, for the *king rose from his throne, and laid aside his robes of state, and covered himself with sackcloth*, ver. 6; and the *people also, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth*, ver. 5; that being the manner of expressing sorrow and humiliation among the eastern nations. But this was not all: not only the king and the people kept a fast, but they made their beasts, their flocks and their herds, to do so likewise. For thus the proclamation ran: *Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed nor drink water*, ver. 7. The *tasting* here refers to the *man*; the *feeding and drinking water* to the *cattle*. This way of keeping fast may seem strange to us, but it was not so to the pagan nations; for Virgil, when he describes the solemn mourning that was upon the death of Julius Cæsar, tells us, that on that day the oxen were not fed, nor any of the cattle driven to water. And indeed this circumstance, if it be well considered, will not appear so extravagant or unreasonable in a public mourning as at first may be imagined; for it doth in some degree contribute to the great solemnity of it; and likewise it is in its own nature apt to excite men

the more to afflict themselves. However, it is a very good expression of their carelessness and unconcernedness about all their worldly matters, and their entire giving up themselves to sorrow. But this by the by, for the giving some light to this passage of scripture.

To proceed. This fasting and afflicting of their bodies was not the only expression of the Ninevites' repentance; they were by the proclamation commanded *every man to cry mightily to the Lord*, ver. 8; to put up earnest prayers to him that he would pardon their sins and spare their city. And not only so, but, which was the main thing of all, *to turn every man from his evil ways*; to forsake those sins they were guilty of; especially that which was the crying, notorious sin of the city, which it seems by the text was injustice and oppression: *Let every one turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hand*, ver. 8; and this, as it follows, they faithfully put in practice. What now was the result of all this? what benefit did the king of Nineveh receive by this their solemn fasting and prayer? Why, they obtained all that they desired; for it is told us that *God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he said he would do unto them; and he did it not*.

This is a brief account of the case of Nineveh, as it is here related by the prophet. Two things we may gather from it very proper to be insisted on upon this day. On this day, I say, wherein, after the example of the Ninevites, the whole people of this land, by proclamation of the queen and her nobles, are met together, "to humble ourselves before Al-

“mighty God for our manifold sins, and to supplicate his divine majesty for the pardon of them, and the preservation of us from the hands of our enemies by protecting her majesty, and giving happy success to her arms both by sea and land.”

Two things, I say, we may gather from this story :

First, Of how great efficacy public fasting and prayer, when duly performed, are for the averting public judgments and the procuring public blessings.

Secondly, What is required to a due performance of public fasting and prayer, so that they may prove thus effectual. I begin with

I. The efficacy of public fasting and prayer, when duly performed, for the averting public judgments and obtaining public blessings. We cannot deny our assent to this, if we believe the story of the Ninevites, which I have now given an account of. And we can no more doubt of the truth of that story, than we doubt of the truth of what our Saviour himself hath delivered. For he on solemn occasions has confirmed the main parts of that story, by giving testimony both of Jonah's being *three days and three nights in the whale's belly*, and likewise to the *repentance of the Ninevites upon his preaching to them*, Matth. xii. 40, 41. But there are other as illustrious proofs to be met with in scripture of the efficacy of fasting and prayer for those purposes, as is this instance of the Ninevites. When the Moabites and Amorites, and other neighbouring nations, 2 Chron. xx. 1. were gathered together in a great army against Judah, and the king and all the nation were in a very great consternation, by reason

of the danger that thereby threatened them, what course do they take to obtain deliverance of God from those very enemies? Why it is told us, in the chapter that was read this morning, that *Jehoshaphat the king was afraid, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah*, ver. 3. *And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord*, ver. 4. And the success of their fasting and prayer was answerable to their expectation. For God was *entreated hereby, and wrought that day a great deliverance for his people, destroying all their enemies, and that without any fighting on their parts, by setting them one against another*, ver. 22, 23, &c.

Thus also when the Jews were carried captive into Babylon, what other means did they use for their delivery out of that bondage, but those we are speaking of; a public solemn fast, and prayer to God. Thus it is told us, Ezra viii. 21. that *a solemn fast was proclaimed, that they might afflict themselves before the Lord their God, to seek of him a right way for them, and for their little ones, and for their substance*. And then it follows, ver. 23. that *they fasted and besought God for this, and he was entreated of them*.

Thus again when the whole nation of the Jews was in danger to be utterly destroyed by the cruel orders that Ahasuerus the king had sent forth, that on a certain day they should be massacred, man, woman, and child, throughout his dominions, Esther iii. 13, the remedy which they apply to in this extremity was still fasting and prayer: *In every pro-*

vince, wheresoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was a great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes, chap. iv. 3. And God had regard to this their fasting and humiliation, and raised up queen Esther to save them from destruction; she likewise having first prepared herself for this work by solemn fasting and prayer.

Lastly, to name no more texts: this is the method that God himself prescribed to his people for the preventing that destruction that he had solemnly threatened them with by his prophet Joel: *Now, saith the Lord, turn ye even unto me with all your heart, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, Joel ii. 12: and rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil, ver. 13. Blow the trumpet in Sion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, ver. 15: gather the people, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet, ver. 16. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them, ver. 17. Well, what success were they to expect when they had done this? Why it follows, *Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and will pity his people, ver. 18. Yea, the Lord will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith; and I**

will no more make you a reproach among the heathen, ver. 19: but I will remove far off from you the northern army; and so on, ver. 20.

But this doctrine of the efficacy of fasting and prayer for the averting public judgments will not go down with some among us. There are a sort of men that think very meanly of these exercises, and all such like. They will not deny but there may be some policy in setting apart days of fasting and prayer in extraordinary emergencies. But as for any real benefit from God by such appointment, notwithstanding all our scripture stories, they believe nothing of it. May I have leave to propose and examine a little what they have to say for this their opinion.

Some of them go upon the hypothesis of God's decrees. If, say they, God governs the world, it is certain every thing comes to pass by his order and decrees. And can we be so foolish as to think that we can make him alter his counsels or change his methods of acting by our fasting or prayers, or any thing that we can do? But to this I answer, If this be a difficulty, sure it is no very great one; for the Ninevites in my text easily got over it: and yet in their case they had a fairer colour to make this objection against their fasting and prayer than any of us can possibly have. God, as you have heard, sent his prophet to them, to deliver to them a short, but very peremptory message, *that within forty days Nineveh should be destroyed*: this the prophet told them, and this they believed. According to these men's reasoning now, how could they hope, by any act or endeavour of theirs, to reverse the decrees of God? Either God resolved to destroy their

city, or he did not. If he did not, Jonah was a false prophet, and they might, for all his preaching, have securely continued in that course they had hitherto followed. If God did really resolve to do as he had said, his will and counsel, being unchangeable, must stand firm ; nor can any human creature, by any thing he can do, either resist it or alter it. To what purpose therefore should they use endeavours ? But the Ninevites did not reason thus, but argued after another manner : *Who can tell, say they, but God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not*, chap. iii. 9. They believed God's decree to be conditional. If they turned from their evil ways, they thought God would turn from his fierce indignation. If they changed their manners, God would change his purpose : and therefore, doing what was in their power, they promised to themselves good success ; and the event shewed that in this matter they reasoned very truly.

Well, but this answer does not satisfy. The Ninevites might reason as they pleased ; but every one who knows any thing of God, knows that he is in his nature unchangeable, (immutability being one of his essential attributes.) And this the scripture declares over and over again, telling us, that *with him there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning*, James i. 17 ; and that the *Strength of Israel*, as he *cannot lie*, so neither *can he repent : for he is not a man, that he should repent*, 1 Sam. xv. 29. But now to suppose that upon our fasting and prayer God grants some things to us, or confers some benefits upon us, which without that fasting and prayer he would not have done, is in effect to say, that our fasting and prayers can produce a change, an alteration in the

mind and counsel of God ; and then, what is become of his immutability ? But in truth, this, though it looks like an argument, is but a mere fallacy. God's hearkening to, or being moved by our prayers or other endeavours, doth not in the least clash with the unchangeableness of his nature. It is true, when, upon our prayers and fasting and repentance, God is pleased to give us those things we pray for, which without those conditions he would not have done ; it cannot be denied that here is a change somewhere : but if the matter be examined, it will be found to be in us, and not in God. God's mind was always the same towards us ; that is, he resolved that if we humbly and heartily begged such and such mercies and blessings at his hands, and did otherwise qualify ourselves for them, we should have them ; but if we did not, we should go without them. When therefore upon our prayers we obtain that deliverance or that blessing which we had not before, it is not he that is changed, but we. We, by performing the conditions he required of us, do look with another aspect towards him, do entitle ourselves to another kind of dealing with us than we could claim before ; we have made ourselves capable of receiving those benefits which before we were not.

And thus much of the first objection against the efficacy of fasting and prayer, for the obtaining blessings from God. But there is another that is urged by another sort of men, which ought not here to be passed by without considering it.

It is of those who hold the necessity of all events upon mechanical principles. They believe the world to be a great machine, and whatsoever comes to pass

therein is the effect of those fixed and unalterable laws of motion which are established in it; so that whatever happens among mankind has a natural and a necessary cause to produce it; and therefore however in common speech we call those things that are grateful to us the blessings of God, or if they be grievous to us, we call them the punishments of God for our sins, yet they do and must happen promiscuously and indifferently to the good and to the bad: and therefore to what purpose is it to fast and to pray for the obtaining of good things or removing of evil things from us, unless we can suppose that by these our endeavours we can stop the course of nature, or God will stop it for our sakes?

This is the objection; and two things I have to say in answer to it. First, though it should be granted that all outward events owe their production immediately to outward and necessary causes, and that God does not interpose in the hindering or furthering of them, but leaves second causes to work according to their nature: yet there is one whole kind of things, and those too that either are or ought to be the greatest matter of our prayers, that the objection does not at all reach to, viz. those which we call *spiritual things*; such are, not only the pardon of our sins and the favour of God, but all the perfections and accomplishments of our minds, wisdom, and prudence, and fortitude, and all the moral virtues. These, I hope, cannot be called the result of necessary, outward causes, but are the effects of God's grace and our own endeavours. These, therefore, I hope, we may both reasonably and with assurance of success pray for, notwithstanding any thing said in the objection to the contrary: and yet,

let me tell you, even the obtaining these things will go a great way, not only to the bettering the condition of private persons, and delivering them out of their evil circumstances, but to the making any nation or people great and happy and prosperous. For instance, if it should please God upon our hearty repentance, and fervent prayers on this day, to pour out his Spirit upon all orders and degrees of men among us, and make all her majesty's subjects in their several stations sincerely good and virtuous; if it should please God to inspire all her public and her private counsels with true wisdom and unanimity, and a hearty zeal for promoting the public good before any private interests; if it should please him to inspire all her officers and soldiers with courage and resolution and diligence; all her ministers with integrity and uncorruptness; and all her people with the true fear of God, and loyal hearts to her majesty, and sincere love and charity to one another: I would ask whether these very things alone, whatever discouragements we might have from storms and tempest, and all other things that depend upon natural causes, would not give us a glorious prospect of happy times, and put us into comfortable hopes of having those judgments averted which we are now afraid of, and of obtaining all those blessings which on this day we pray for? And yet all these things I have now mentioned are out of the reach, as I said, of mechanical causes. The laws of motion have nothing to do with them; but they are the pure result of the grace and Spirit of God, and of our own hearty prayers and endeavours.

But, secondly, as for those outward events which come upon this world, that seem to depend upon

such principles as we have no power over ; such as health or sickness, peace or war, good or bad weather, plenty or scarcity, victory over our enemies, or being overthrown by them, and the like : though it be acknowledged that all these have natural causes, yet they have not such natural causes as are necessary. They come to us in a natural way, but do not come to us in such a necessary, unavoidable way as the objection supposeth. For here is the thing ; admitting that God Almighty in his government of the world doth not usually step out into extraordinary actions, beyond or above the course of nature, yet he has so contrived the course of nature that such events as we speak of may be hindered or may be forwarded ; may come to pass, or may not come to pass ; may happen this way, or may happen another way, as men behave themselves towards God, and as he sees best for them ; and this without any violence done to nature, or without transgressing the laws of it : so that there is room enough, abundantly enough, left for our endeavours and our prayers ; and as we use them, or use them not, the success and the event shall prove accordingly.

It is a great mistake to think that the affairs of this outward world are managed wholly by mechanical powers, or, which is the same thing, by necessary causes. No ; the wills and the actions of mankind have a mighty influence upon them, as is visible in some of those things I mentioned, as peace and war, health and sickness, victory and overthrow. And nobody, I hope, will say that the actions of men are necessary. But besides, the angels and separate spirits, who are in a great number every where, and are the invisible ministers of God's providence, have not

only an influence over the actions of mankind, by suggesting to their minds a thousand things that perhaps they would otherwise never have thought of; but they have also a mighty influence over those powers of nature that seem to act most necessarily: I mean the elements, as we call them, from whose various combinations arise storms and tempests, fruitful and barren seasons, sickly or healthful years: both these causes, I say, the free as well as the necessary agents of this world, those invisible ministers of God, do so dispose and direct and order, as that they shall produce such events as God sees fittest for mankind, whether it be by way of judgment as a punishment of their sins, or by way of mercy as a testimony of God's acceptance of them. And all this too comes to pass in a natural way, that is, it is the common and usual method of God's providence in the government of the world. But then I add further, whenever there happens a just occasion for God to exercise his extraordinary power above or against the course of nature, he will not fail to do that likewise; and abundance of instances of that in his government of the world he hath given us, and, for any thing that I know, doth yet give us.

These things considered, we have no reason to imagine that because things are commonly dispensed to us by the ministry of second causes, of which we can give some natural account, that therefore God had no hand in bringing such things to pass in the world, but that they come fortuitously or necessarily, and cannot be hindered or forwarded by the prayers or endeavours of mankind: no, certainly; though the effect, whatever it was, was immediately produced by second causes, yet it was God that, by the

ministers of his providence, laid the train of those things, and so ordered and managed them, as that righteous and good ends should be served by the effects that they produce. So that, as our blessed Saviour hath told us, not so much *as a sparrow doth fall to the ground*, but that it may be truly said, *it is by the will of our heavenly Father*, Matt. x. 29.

To conclude this point therefore : since all events whatsoever do so absolutely depend upon the will and pleasure of God, it plainly follows that it is so far from being needless or impertinent to have recourse to solemn humiliation, and fasting and prayer, in the time of public danger, as the objection would infer, that, on the contrary, the use of these is indispensably necessary, if we would have our affairs to prosper. These being the means which both the light of nature hath directed mankind to for that purpose, and accordingly hath been always practised by all nations who have had any sense of God and his providence, and the means likewise which God himself has appointed, and to the efficacy of which he has given many testimonies in his holy word, as I have already shewed.

II. Having thus done with the first head of my Discourse, I now proceed to the other ; viz. What is required to the due performance of public fasting and prayer, that so they may be effectual for the averting the judgments of God, and obtaining his blessing.

I have already read to you the account that the prophet has here given us concerning the behaviour of the Ninevites upon this occasion. He tells us, chap. iii. 5. that *they believed God, and therefore*

they proclaimed a fast: that they cried mightily unto the Lord, and that they turned every one from his evil way, and from the violence that was in his hands, ver. 8. So that if we take our measures from the Ninevites, we must say that there are three things necessary to make our public fasting and prayer effectual to the ends they are designed for :

First, That our fasting do proceed from a truly religious principle, that is to say, from a deep sense of our sins against God, and the punishment we deserve for them.

Secondly, That our prayers for his mercy be very earnest and importunate ; that we *cry mightily unto the Lord*, as the Ninevites here did.

Thirdly, That our fasting and prayer be accompanied with serious resolution to reform our lives, *by turning from our evil way.*

Give me leave to speak very briefly to these three things.

1. First of all ; if we expect to have our solemn fasting at this time effectual to the ends it is designed for, it is necessary that it do proceed from a truly religious principle ; that is to say, from a deep sense of our sins against God, and the punishment we deserve for them. Fasting, as it is a bare abstinence from meat, signifies nothing in God's account ; nay, though we added sackcloth and ashes to it, no more than any other indifferent action of human life. That which gives it its virtue is the inward humiliation of our souls before God for our own sins and the sins of the nation ; and the giving the best expressions we can, by thus punishing and afflicting our bodies, that we are truly grieved and

afflicted for having offended God, and are deeply sensible of what we have deserved from him upon that account. We do hereby declare that we judge and sentence ourselves, that we may prevent the judgment of the Lord. This is the true notion of religious fasting. Without this, it is a sacrifice without an heart; nay, it is declared by God to be an abomination to him: *Is this, says he, the fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day unto the Lord?* Isaiah lviii. 5. No; if the fast go no further than this, it is so far from being acceptable, that he declares by the same prophet, that *it was iniquity, and the solemn meeting of this kind his soul could not away with*, chap. i. 13.

It would be well if all of us here present, who pretend this day to keep a solemn fast to the Lord, would a little examine ourselves upon this point. Do we really come with those qualifications which are required to make a fast a true act of religion, and such as will gain God's acceptance? Do not some of us fast merely for fasting sake, being no more concerned what the state of their souls is towards God, than if they were going to a feast? Do not some of us appear here without any inward sense in the least either of their sins or of the judgments of God which hang over our heads, designing more by this their fasting to shew respect to the queen and her proclamation, than to take any occasion therefrom to examine their own lives, and to lay their sins to heart, and seriously to repent of them for their own and the nation's sake? If there

be any here whose conscience cannot answer them that they come with better designs and dispositions, they might as well forbear their fasting at this time; for it is certain the public is likely to receive little benefit from it. If we would observe a fast to any purpose, it is fit that we come to it with a great zeal and concernment for the nation of which we are members, and also with a hearty sorrow for our sins, and a just apprehension of the wrath and displeasure of God, that we have incurred by them. If we have any concernment for our country, it will shew itself that way. We shall not only be sensible of our own transgressions, and the personal guilt we have thereby contracted, but of the sins and the guilt in which we and the whole kingdom lie involved. We shall sadly consider how we have abused God's mercies, and how we have defeated the ends of his judgments. What ungrateful returns we have made for all his kindnesses, and how we have multiplied our transgressions against heaven with an high hand: and we shall not easily *speak peace to ourselves when there is no peace*, Ezek. xiii. 10. but being apprehensive of what our sins have deserved, we shall stand in continual fear, lest God should visit them upon us. And certainly we of this nation have great reasons for that fear; not but that I hope, as bad as we are, we may be as good as some of the other nations that we have now to deal with: though whether this be true or no, God Almighty only knows, who alone *searcheth the heart*, and, when the iniquities of a people are at the height, knows how or in what manner to visit them. But, I say, considering how long God hath spared us, and how long we have enjoyed the blessings of peace

at home, and all manner of plenty and prosperity, (though perhaps with many fears and just apprehensions of danger,) when most of our neighbours have tasted the cup of God's fury, groaning under the cruelties and miseries of wars and persecutions and desolations; and considering the great privileges and advantages we have for many years enjoyed of a glorious light of the gospel, and all the outward means of grace that could be desired for the eternal salvation of our souls, and that above any nation under heaven; and withal how unprofitable we have been under those means, and what little effect they have had upon us for the bettering our manners or reforming us to a sober Christian conversation; and considering, lastly, how very wicked a great many of us are; what a world of open and gross sins and impieties do reign among us; what a lewd and profane and atheistical spirit seems to have gone out among us, and to prevail upon us; what a deal of hypocrisy is every where to be met with, men making a mighty noise with religion, and being zealous, even to bigotry, for that mode of it which they have taken up, and yet not having one drachm of inward sense of that which it obligeth them to; it being merit enough to sanctify all their other actions be they never so unchristian, if they can but with the Jews cry aloud, *The temple of the Lord*, &c. Jer. vii. 4; I say, considering these things, is there not reason enough to be apprehensive of God's judgments? and to fear, lest he should decree upon us what he once said by his prophet, *Shall I not be avenged of such a nation as this?* Jer. v. 9. At least, is there not reason enough for us all on this day to prostrate ourselves

in the greatest humility before God, heartily bewailing our own sins and the sins of our country; and earnestly begging of God, with devout prayers and tears, that *he would be merciful unto us; that he would not deal with us according to our deserts*; but that he would spare our nation, and neither give us up to be ruined by our own intestine divisions, nor deliver us over as a prey to our enemies?

2. And that leads me to the second thing which is required to the due performance of a solemn fast and humiliation, viz. fervent and importunate application to the throne of grace for the averting those judgments we have reason to fear, and bestowing those blessings upon us we stand in need of. Indeed if we be so truly sensible of our sins and of our danger as we ought to be, it will necessarily put us upon earnest prayers and supplications to God Almighty, that he would be pleased to pardon those sins for which we humble ourselves before him, and stop those punishments we are conscious they have deserved. This was one article of the proclamation that was made in Nineveh for the public fast, viz. that *every one should cry mightily unto the Lord*, Jonah iii. 8. And great reason there is for so doing; for hereby we do most properly acknowledge God to be the Lord and Governor of the world; and that he is the disposer of all events that happen to us; and that we do not trust in ourselves, nor in our own powers, nor in the strength of our allies, nor in any arm of flesh, but that we wholly depend upon him for all the good we hope for.

Let us all, therefore, on this day, devoutly throw ourselves at the footstool of God, and most earnestly supplicate his divine majesty, that he would be mer-

ciful to us and our country; that he would pardon our sins, and turn his anger from us. Let every one of us this day take up the priest's office, and say the words of the prophet, *Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the heathen, Where is their God?* Joel ii. 17. Let us pray heartily that God would, *in this our day*, give us a true understanding of *the things that belong to our peace*, Luke xix. 42: that he would incline the heart of every one in this kingdom to love and hold fast the true religion, and to live according to it; that he would heal all our breaches, and put a stop to our unaccountable divisions, which above all other things do threaten the public peace and safety; that he would bless and preserve the queen, and direct all her counsels, and inspire all who under her have the management of the public affairs, with such true wisdom and piety and zeal for the common good, that, laying aside all private interests and applications, all their aims may be directed to the promoting the glory of God, and the peace and tranquillity of the kingdom: that he would command the winds and the seas, that they do us no further mischief: that he would give a blessing to the undertakings of her majesty's forces, and those of her allies: and, lastly, that he would grant us a happy peace, *that we being delivered from the hands of our enemies may serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life*, Luke i. 74, 75.

All these things we may and we ought to pray for, and to pray for them heartily and earnestly and importunately. And though we cannot posi-

tively assure ourselves that every particular of them shall be granted upon our prayers, because perhaps God sees that we of this nation are not qualified for all these blessings; the greater number of us putting a stop to the efficacy of the public prayers for those things, by their obstinate resolution to continue in their wicked practices and affronts to God Almighty; and because perhaps God sees that it is better for us to be exercised with difficulties at home and with dangers from abroad, for the trial of all sorts of men among us; yet this we may depend upon, that our hearty prayers to God for those things will not be in vain: they will have such success, if they be affectionate and hearty, as that the nation will be much the better for them; but to be sure they who put them up will find their account in them. And no doubt but we shall have the good effect of our prayers, if,

3. In the third and last place, they be accompanied with serious resolutions to reform our lives, and to turn from our evil ways. This is the third thing required to the due performance of public fasting and prayer; and indeed it is the main thing of all. This was that which God especially took notice of in the fast of the Ninevites, and for which he reversed his sentence of destroying their city. The text tells us that *God saw that they turned from their evil way; and therefore he repented of the evil, that he said he would do unto them; and he did it not*, chap. iii. 10. Their turning from their evil way here mentioned is, I conceive, to be understood of their solemn resolutions and purposes to turn from them; of the reality of which they might at that time give some instances and expressions.

But of the fruits of those resolutions and purposes, and how they afterwards practised, Jonah the prophet stayed not long enough to be a witness of: and for that reason it is that I say here, that our solemn fasting and prayer ought to be accompanied with a serious resolution to forsake our sins, without mentioning the actual forsaking of them. Indeed, I take it, that this is sufficient to obtain God's acceptance of our fasting and prayers: and truly more than this we cannot do at any single time, and yet less than this it will be an affront to God to offer to him. All our fasting and prayers will signify nothing without a real intention to forsake the sins we fast for, and to live such a life as to make us worthy of the blessings we pray for: *If I incline to wickedness in my heart*, says the Psalmist, *the Lord will not hear me*, Ps. lxvi. 18. *We know*, saith the man in the gospel, *that God heareth not sinners*, John ix. 31: nay, God doth not only not hear sinners, but their prayers are an abomination to him: *The sacrifice of the wicked*, says Solomon, *is an abomination to the Lord*, Prov. xv. 8.

But what then, are not wicked men to fast with us, and to pray with us? Yes, certainly: how else should they ever come to be good? But they must leave off their wickedness, or if that cannot be done at once or in a moment, they must at least sincerely purpose and resolve against it, and then put up their prayers to God. If they do not do this, they affront God. Instead of praying to him, they defy him, and put a mockery upon him. For is it not a plain mockery? Is it not a defiance of God's justice and holiness, to come, for instance, to humble myself before God for the sins of the nation, and to pretend

seriously to beg pardon for my own personal sins, my whoredoms, my adulteries, my extortions and oppressions, my drunkenness and debaucheries, my hypocrisy in pretending a zeal for religion, when yet I neither believe nor practise any thing of it; and yet, at the same time, I know in my own heart that I mean not to forsake one of those sins, but to take the next occasion that offers itself to commit them over again? Till therefore we can seriously resolve to quit our evil courses, to forsake every known, wilful, open sin, which we are conscious to ourselves that we live in, let us not think ourselves qualified to join in any public fast, or to put up our prayers to God either for ourselves or for the nation. The sum of all that I have said upon this head is elegantly expressed by the prophet Isaiah, part of whose words I have already quoted, and shall now conclude with the rest: *This is the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, &c.* chap. lviii. 6—9.

God Almighty give us grace thus to fast and thus to pray, that so we and our country may have the benefit of it in this world, and that it may be a means of promoting our eternal salvation in the other.

A SERMON

ON

1 JOHN III. 7.

Little children, let no man deceive you : he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

ST. John's design in these words, and in the greatest part of this chapter, is to convince those to whom he writes of the absolute necessity there is of living a pure and holy life, if ever they mean to go to heaven: and this in opposition to those Gnostic principles that went about in those days, which pretended to reconcile Christianity with immoral practices. To this end he tells them, in the third verse, that *whosoever hath the hope in him* of being happy with Christ, at his second appearance, *must purify himself, even as he is pure*. In the sixth verse he tells them, that it is in vain to call themselves Christ's disciples if they indulge themselves in any sin, for *whosoever abideth in Christ sinneth not* : and *whosoever sinneth* (that is, lives in any course of sin) *hath not seen Christ, nor known him*, how much soever he pretends to the knowledge of him. In my text, which is the next verse, he goes on to the same purpose, *Little children, &c.* that is to say, He only shall be accounted righteous before God who practiseth righteousness in all his conversation, who is righteous in the same manner (though not in the same degree) as Christ was. And, lastly, in the tenth verse: *In this*, says he, *the children of God are manifest, and*

the children of the Devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God. All this is to shew how inseparable true holiness is from true Christianity, and how indispensably necessary it is that they who would live happily in the other world, should live righteously and soberly and godly in this.

But that which I at this time take notice of, and mean to insist upon, is that preface with which St. John introduceth his proposition in my text; *Little children, let no man deceive you.* If you ask what I gather from hence, I answer thus: This caution of his seems to imply, that although of all the deceits in the world those which are about the terms of our salvation be the most dangerous, yet nevertheless this is a matter wherein people are wonderfully apt to be deceived. Mankind are strangely prone to find out ways to cheat themselves and others into a belief that they may appear righteous in God's account, though they are not righteous as Christ is, and consequently that they may go to heaven at last, though they continue in their sins all their days: and therefore there is very great need that they should be often put in mind of, and often warned against these deceits. This, I say, is that which seems to be intimated in this preface or caution of the apostle.

I am the more ready to draw this inference from this passage, because I observe, that when St. Paul in his writings has occasion to treat of this argument, he is wont to give the same caution, and in the same language; *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor &c. shall inherit the kingdom of God,* 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Again;

This ye know, that no whoremonger, &c. hath any inheritance in the kingdom of God and of Christ. Let no man deceive you with vain words, Eph. v. 5. Lastly : Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. If a man sow to the flesh, he shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if he sow to the Spirit, he shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting, Gal. vi. 7, 8. What now can be the meaning of all these cautions, *not to be deceived*, unless the apostles did apprehend that people were very apt to be imposed upon in this matter, and to take up notions and fancies that they might go to heaven without living a virtuous and holy life?

But in truth the matter of fact doth sufficiently speak itself, and there is no need to have recourse to the authority of the apostles for the proof of it. As Christ's religion goes in the world, God knows too many of all persuasions, and in all communions, are not only in danger of being led away, but are actually led away, with this deceit that we are cautioned against. To go no further than our own country, in which we have reason to hope there are as many sincere good Christians as in any part of Europe of the same dimensions; yet, what a great number we have of those who profess Christ's religion among us, who are so far from living up to that holiness and virtue that our Lord has required of his disciples, that we may truly say their lives are a scandal to the gospel of Christ! And yet of this great number of professors who live thus viciously, and, as I may say, in contradiction to their religion, yet there are not many, or rather very few of them, but hope to go to heaven. Not one of a thousand in any communion

thinks himself a reprobate, or that he shall perish everlastingly : but they generally believe that they shall do well enough in the other world. Something or other they have wherewith to bear up their spirits against all the fears of damnation, and to encourage them to hope for heaven, though they cannot but at the same time acknowledge, that their lives and conversations are inconsistent with the religion they profess.

What now must we say of all these ? Are they not perfectly under the delusion we are speaking of ? Is it not plain they hope to be righteous in God's account without doing righteousness ; and that they hope to be saved by some other way than by living a holy life ? Certain it is : and therefore great reason is there that people should be often called upon, should have often this caution of the apostle's pressed upon them ; *Little children, let no man deceive you.*

But it may justly be wondered at, since God hath so positively declared himself in his revelation to mankind by Jesus Christ, that *without true holiness no man is to expect future happiness*, Heb. xii. 14. how it comes to pass that Christians generally, Christians of all communions, are so very apt to hope for salvation without holiness : nay, how is it possible for them, considering the plain declarations of the gospel, to imagine that any thing short of sincere virtue should carry them to heaven ? To give some answer to this inquiry is what I design now to do.

And here I shall lay before you some of the principal things which I take to be the grounds and occasions of men's deceits in this matter, hoping that the exposing of them may be of some use for the preventing such deceits.

1. And the first thing that occurs to me among the several causes of men's mistakes about the terms of their salvation is, our being apt to measure the nature of God and his proceedings with us by those rules by which we are wont to govern ourselves in cases where we are concerned. I grant, indeed, in all cases where we proceed according to the rules of right reason, we may justly conclude that God will so proceed with us in the like cases. But now, in this low degenerate state we are in in this world, we have got God knows how many false principles, which as they are apt to influence us in our making a judgment upon ourselves and our dealings with others, so are we apt, upon their account, to fancy that all God's dealings with us must be suitable thereunto.

I will give two or three instances of this. In the first place we, in our natural tempers, are not much inclined to be hard or severe upon any man, except in a case where we ourselves have received injury from him. This now leads us to fancy, that since God receives no real injury from any man's sins, therefore he will not be much concerned in the punishment of them, and we may hope to be everlastingly happy hereafter, though we be not holy and virtuous in this life. For thus we reason : I, that am far less pitiful than God is, cannot find in my heart to make any person miserable (if it was in my power to do it) that hath never injured me, though he have otherwise behaved himself very foolishly and very wickedly ; how then can I imagine that the infinitely kind and good God will give any man over to destruction, though he may have been very wicked in some respects, considering that God

hath suffered no injury by him : for all the sins and wickedness in the world doth not in the least touch God Almighty, that is, he receives no damage from them. His infinite glory and happiness is as perfect and undisturbed as if none of them had ever happened : how therefore can he concern himself so severely to punish them as the preachers talk in their pulpits?—But now it will be enough to expose the falseness and vanity of this sort of reasoning, to consider, that God in his dealings with mankind is not to be looked upon as a party, but as a Governor, and as a Judge. It is true, God suffers nothing by all the wickednesses and villainies of men or devils, were they ten thousand times greater than they are. But yet it concerns his justice, as he is supreme Ruler and Governor of the world, to make a discrimination between good and evil : to reward all those who sincerely endeavour to observe his laws, (which are all for the good of mankind,) and, on the other side, to punish all those who wilfully and impenitently transgress them. For if God did not do this, how could he approve himself to be that King and Governor of mankind, that righteous Judge of all the earth, which he hath declared himself to be. Sure I am, this cannot be denied to be good reasoning, if we put the case as to earthly rulers or magistrates. Suppose a civil magistrate should have a criminal brought before him accused, for instance, of murder, burglary, or the like, and the fact is proved ; would you not have him in that case to pronounce the sentence that the law has awarded to all such malefactors ? Certainly you must think it infinitely reasonable he should, though yet he is no more injured or affronted with what

the malefactor hath done, than you are injured when the story is told you.

Thus again, to give another instance of our judging of God's ways by our own : the temper of mankind, as it generally stands, is apt to be pleased with little things, and displeased with little things also. A little outward respect or civility from any person, let him otherwise be a bad man, has the power to gain our friendship, or at least to buy off our displeasure against him, provided he hath done us no harm. And, on the other side, a little thing, if it thwart our interests and inclinations, has the power to disoblige us, and to make us angry with the man that doth it, though otherwise he be a worthy, honest man. Now finding this to be our own temper, we are apt to think that God Almighty must be of the same, and accordingly we most commonly represent him to ourselves as one who is pleased with little things, and displeased with little things also. And from hence do proceed these two different effects ; that one sort of men, who are of a timorous, melancholy temper, are always fancying that God is angry with them for every the least thing that seems to them to be irregular ; and, on the other side, another sort of men, who are of a more sanguine complexion, are apt to believe that any sort of deference or outward respect they pay to God's commands, or the commands of the church for God's sake, though it be but in small instances, that this will atone for all other sins whatsoever. But now both these sorts of persons are mightily mistaken ; for God is not so easily displeased with every small fault, especially when he sees that fault proceeds from the infirmity of our nature, which we

cannot help ; nor is he at all to be bribed or bought into a good liking of us by any outward service, though it be never so much of his own appointment, unless the whole man be entirely devoted to him ; unless there be a thorough conformity of a man's mind and will and actions, to those eternal and unchangeable laws of holiness and virtue, which he hath prescribed us to walk by. For the effectual curing therefore of all superstition in our minds ; (for I must confess I have no other notion of superstition, but that it is a fancying that God is pleased with little things, and displeased with little things likewise ;) I say, for the removing this wicked principle out of our minds, let us always take care to represent God to ourselves as a Being the most perfectly and immutably holy and pure and good that is possible to be conceived. Let us frame such ideas of him, as to believe that nothing in the earth is so contradictory to his blessed nature as folly and sin ; and that he never acts arbitrarily, but always loves and hates, rewards and punishes, according as the object he has to deal with hath a suitableness and agreement with his holy nature, or a disagreeableness and contrariety to it. And therefore certainly whatever is wicked or impure can never be acceptable to him, no outward advantages of dress, no cringes, no compliments can render it lovely in his eyes. On the other side, true and substantial virtue and goodness in the mind, though attended with never so many weaknesses and failings, will for ever be his delight, and will for ever be rewarded by him. And consequently it is in vain to hope the gaining of his favour by any thing in the world that comes short of true goodness, and they who have

true goodness shall never need to fear the losing of his favour, though otherwise their performances be attended with many imperfections.

To give one instance more of our judging of God's ways by our own ways, and then I leave this head. We are apt in our tempers to have different notions and apprehensions of things past and present, and from hence we are often led to believe that God will have so likewise; and this is another ground of mistake about the conditions of our salvation. To explain myself: when we have newly done a thing that our conscience declares against as a great sin, we are struck with a pungent sense of the wickedness of the action, and we accuse ourselves most heinously for it, and are sufficiently sensible what we deserve at God's hands for having thus notoriously broken his sacred laws. But now this very fact that was thus horrid in its appearance when it was first done, yet after some time, either all our first impressions concerning it are worn away, and the thing is quite forgot; or, if it be remembered, yet looking upon it as done long ago, we are not much concerned about it: and we are apt to believe that God hath such apprehensions of the thing as we have. The stinging, tormenting remembrance of the fact is gone from us, and so we too readily incline to believe that a very slight remembrance of it remains with God likewise. Now by this means it is no difficult matter for a man who hath not much used himself to inspection, to bring a vast number of sins, and those aggravated with all odious circumstances, into a very little account; the greatest part of them shall perhaps slip his memory, and of those that he remembers, the heinous aggra-

vating circumstances are perhaps forgot. But if he should remember any thing of them, yet he cannot now look upon the sins with a quarter of that horror that he found in himself when he newly committed them; by which means here is a vast great sum which a man has to account for before God, dwindled in a manner into a trifle. And sure God is of the same mind too; and since a little repentance will serve to satisfy a man, why should it not satisfy God also? But now here is our mistake: though we be shallow creatures, and easily lose our impressions of things, and easily forget our past actions, yet God falls not under these imputations of weakness. All things are present to him alike at all times: and he has the same sense of men's actions, and the same resentments against them (if they were bad) an hundred years after they were done, that he had the very moment they were done. They are neither forgotten, nor the malignity of them lessened in his account by any tract of time. The way therefore to keep ourselves from being imposed upon by such fancies, is this: let us imagine that all the sins of our life (I speak not of the little daily sins which every man commits, but all those sins) which we looked upon as heinous, and upon which our conscience flew in our faces when we had been guilty of them; I say, let us imagine all these sins, together with all their aggravating circumstances, and all the severe and bitter reflections we at that time made thereupon; imagine, I say, all these to be at once present to our minds, and to affect us in the same proportion all together as every one of them did singly, viz. that all the grief and anguish and tormenting reflections we felt in ourselves upon

account of any one of them should not now be lost, but bear a part of that grievous load they would lay upon us when we took them all together. What sort of thoughts now should we in that case have of ourselves? Sure I am the very best of us would not have much comfort, but the worser sort of us must sink into desperation. But this is our comfort, God will be merciful to all upon their true repentance, and will never remember against them their former iniquities. Nay, and this I think I may say further, God will not deal more severely with the worst of us than we ourselves should in our conscience think we deserved, were all our sins and transgressions, with the true circumstances of them, set in the same view and order before us that they are in his eternal mind. And thus much of the first head, of things which occasion our mistakes and deceits about this matter of the terms of our salvation.

2. But, in the second place, another thing that is apt to make us less dread the consequences of a wicked life, and to encourage our hopes of heaven upon very easy conditions, is the vast number of delinquents that God has to punish, if he will punish all who do not lead such lives as the gospel prescribes. For thus we reason: though my own conscience tells me I am not so good as I ought to be, yet I have reason to believe that I am not worse than the generality of those I converse with, and yet they hope to be happy hereafter, or if they be not, Lord, how few shall be saved! Sure God will not send to hell such a prodigious multitude of souls as he must be supposed to do, if he save none but the truly virtuous and religious: for at this rate, hell will be very full and heaven will be extremely

empty. To speak plainly now to this: If those people who reason in this manner be honest and well-meaning Christians, and do in the main of their lives endeavour to serve God, and to live righteously and soberly among their neighbours, though yet their lives are not so strict, or so devout, or so perfect, that they can satisfy themselves that they have attained to those degrees of piety and virtue that the gospel seems to require of them: I say, if this be their condition, I would not willingly deprive them of the comfort of this reasoning of theirs: not that there is any force in their argument, but because we have really reason to hope well of these men, and of such as they are. And I do believe there is a great number of such in the world, men who are honest and sincere in the main, and do endeavour to approve themselves to God, but are yet in a low and imperfect state of virtue. Now as to these, I say, I would by no means discourage them, only desire them for God's sake, and for their own peace sake, to take a little more pains, and to break loose from that weight which hangs upon them, those sins which do now *so easily beset them*. This they may certainly do, if they will apply their minds to it, and by what means they may make *their calling and election sure* to themselves, which at present is uncertain. But now having said this, I add further; for any man that hath no sense of religion, or who lives in a stupid, sensual, or worldly life, with little regard to God or the concernments of his soul, or who obstinately perseveres in any course of open sin against his conscience; for any such man to reason after this sort, or to make use of this argument of the multitude of offenders for

the comforting himself that he shall escape well enough, is one of the most impudent things that can be. For admit that the number of such wicked people as he is was as great as he supposeth it to be, (as we hope it is not,) yet shall the number of offenders affrighten the just Judge and Governor of the world from executing his righteous laws upon them? It often indeed happens among men, that the multitude of criminals is a security to them from punishment; for the greatness of their number may make it formidable to the magistrate to grapple with them, and therefore for reasons of state there is a necessity of conniving at the most, and making examples of a few. But is this any reason for God Almighty to spare insolent rebels? that God that made the world with his breath, and can with the same breath turn it into nothing; that God who receives no profit or advantage by our utmost services, nor can suffer any diminution of his infinite glory and blessedness, though we and all mankind were utterly destroyed. I say, with such a God as this, can it be urged as an argument to have pity on offenders, to say that they are too many to be punished? It is rather a blasphemy to name it. And then as for that suggestion, that after this way of dealing with mankind, hell would indeed be full, but heaven would be empty; let them not trouble themselves about that. It is to be hoped God has more good people in the world than they (who measure other folks by themselves) are aware of: and thousands and ten thousands, whom they never think of, *shall at the last day come from the east, and from the west, and from all the quarters under heaven, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac,*

and Jacob, in the kingdom of God; when these wicked children of the kingdom, who had so many advantages above the rest of mankind, shall be cast out, Matt. viii. 11, 12. Yet further, if we should admit the greatest part of mankind to be as bad as they would have them, to be atheists, or knaves, or hypocrites; nay, if we should suppose all mankind to be devils incarnate; yet I could by no means yield, that for all this hell would be near so full as heaven. For how many soever the devils and wicked men be, there is no doubt in the world but there are abundantly more (I was going to say infinitely more) happy and pure spirits who never departed from God, and who now do, and ever shall inhabit those vast and glorious mansions above, than the number of that infernal crew can amount to.

3. Another thing that leads us often into deceits, by making us think better of our condition than we ought to do, is our aptness to measure our actions, not by the intrinsic goodness or evilness that is in them, but by the popular opinions that go about concerning them.

Thus, for instance, when we find that there are sundry practices frequently and commonly used among men, which, though they are expressly against the letter of God's law, do not yet sound very ill among the men of the world, nor is there any mark of infamy put upon them; we are apt to conclude from hence, that these practices, though they be sins in some sort, yet so small they are, that we cannot doubt but they will be easily passed by, when we come to make our accounts with God. This, I say, is a great temptation to indulge ourselves in many sins, and yet, for all that, to believe

that all things are right with us: for who is there that is led by this sort of principles that can think himself much concerned to avoid that action which he sees every day to be so inoffensively practised; nay, perhaps there is not only no blemish, no disreputation doth attend it, but among many it is thought allowable, and by some commendable.

I must confess I do think it is this taking our estimates of virtue and vice from the received opinions of them we converse with, that does as much mischief to souls, by making them to presume on God's mercy, while they continue in such practices as are directly contrary to his laws, as any other thing whatsoever. For instance, what a world of murders hath the notion of honour that obtains among us been the occasion of, though yet it be the most mishapen, unnatural notion of honour that can be. For if a wise heathen was to be asked which was the more honourable in a gentleman, to pass by a trifling injury, or to revenge it to death; I dare say he would answer, (I am sure Socrates and Cicero would so have answered,) that it was below a man of honour to take notice of such affronts as now prove the most mortal quarrels of the most honourable men among Christians. What is it that makes lewdness and drunkenness, and such other debauches, so frequently practised among us, but only this, the fashionableness of the sins doth so blind our judgments, that we think them excusable frolics, how severely soever God has declared against them. A man would not be prevailed upon to swear or to curse, or to talk profanely and irreligiously in his common conversation, but that the sin is so ordinary, that he believes God will estimate the guilt of

it, not according to the rigour of his laws, but according to the vogue it hath obtained among men. Though our religion doth most strictly forbid backbiting and speaking evil of others, yet seeing this is the general entertainment of most conversations, one thinks it no great matter to stretch a point of duty as to this business, and he hopes God will easily make allowance for it: thus apt are we to be swayed by the popular opinions about good or evil actions. But yet, for all that, it is of infinitely dangerous consequence; for whoever frames his life according to this principle, it is ten to one but he runs himself into most deplorable mischiefs: for *God sees not as man sees*. The impartial Judge of the world will take account of our actions, not according to the opinions of the men of this world whom we conversed with, but according to their intrinsic goodness or turpitude. He will indeed make great allowances for men's ignorance and mistakes where they were unavoidable, but there is no reason to expect that he should grant any favour in those cases where men saw their duty well enough, and knew likewise what stress God in his word laid upon it; and yet would be bold to transgress it, because they saw other men did. The sin was a modish sin, and therefore they made a slight matter of it.

4. Another occasion of our deceit in this matter is the general opinion that is entertained about sins of infirmity. We all know that sins of infirmity are consistent with a state of salvation, otherwise none of mankind could be saved. For the best men are attended with many weaknesses and imperfections, and have daily occasion to implore the divine mercy upon the account thereof; *in many things we of-*

fend all, James iii. 2 ; and in truth, as the state of mankind now is, we may account him the best and worthiest Christian (not he who never transgresseth God's laws, for perhaps there is no such man, but he) who hath the fewest mixtures of folly and sin in his life. All this now is true ; but because this is true, we will have a great deal more to be so which is not ; for finding that the best of men have infirmities, and that those infirmities shall be no bar to their salvation, we are apt to conclude that our sins, how grievous or how habitual soever they be, are but our infirmities likewise, and that we may go to heaven for all them. The truth is, to that unreasonable degree of latitude have we commonly extended sins of infirmity, or those sins which are consistent with a state of holiness and happiness, that really there are hardly any, but atheists or downright profane irreligious persons, but may very well shelter all the sins and great miscarriages of their lives under this comfortable name. For what are those sins which we call sins of infirmity, but such sins (be they in their own nature never so heinous) as we do often resolve against, and are perhaps troubled at after we have done them, but which yet we continue in the practice of ? There are a great many who have so far a sense of religion, that they cannot avoid being troubled and concerned at their wicked lives. It is with some reluctance that they act as they do ; and they cannot forbear accusing themselves, and perhaps resolving to do so no more ; but yet for all that, they live never the better ; they do not amend one fault, for all those convictions and resolutions : let the sins which reign in them be what they will, drunkenness, or lewdness, or covetousness,

or injustice, or malice, or neglect of God's worship, or the like, yet the next temptation that comes in their way to any of these sins, they shall not fail to comply with, though it was not a month before, that they were troubled at themselves for living at this rate, and resolved to forsake these courses for ever. But now all the while they remain in this condition, the sins they commit must needs be sins of infirmity, because really it is their infirmity and weakness that they do not conquer them. Their intentions, their purposes and designs, are without doubt right and honest, and therefore they cannot doubt but that they shall be accepted upon the account of them, though they never live up to their good principles, nor conquer any of those sins they labour under.

This, I say, is our common opinion concerning sins of infirmity. And there is no doubt hundreds of persons, under the protection and security of this notion, mean very well, and live very ill; nay, and perhaps die so, and yet, after all, think they shall go to heaven.

But now all this is extremely false reasoning. It is true, it is the men's weakness and infirmity that they live in a course of sin contrary to all their sentiments and all their serious purposes; but yet, for all that, if the sins they live in the practice of be open, known sins, such sins as are plainly forbid by the laws of the gospel, and are there declared against for such as shall exclude from the kingdom of heaven, they are not sins of infirmity, but wilful, presumptuous sins, which the men shall answer for to God at the peril of their souls, with what reluctance soever they committed them, or what resolutions soever they used to make against

them: for do not deceive yourselves, that only is a sin of infirmity which a man cannot help; that which a man is drawn into through surprise or want of time to consider. But all habits and customs of sin fall under another denomination. If a man make it his practice to break God's laws in his actions, and to do such things not only once or twice, but customarily, as often as the temptation returns, which Christ Jesus hath most strictly forbid, let every such man know that these sins of his are not the effects of weakness and infirmity, but are the fruits of a wicked, unsanctified heart. And till his mind and spirit be transformed into a better frame, so transformed that it hath influence upon his whole life and conversation, so as to make that holy and regular as to the main course of it, he is not to think himself in the number of God's children, or any ways qualified to receive the rewards of good men in the life to come. Whosoever seriously applies himself to forsake his sins, and to lead a holy and a Christian life, shall certainly (through the grace of God, which is never wanting to such persons) compass his purposes and designs; *sin shall not have dominion over him, but he shall in all things be conqueror, through Christ that loveth us*, Rom. vi. 14. viii. 37: but for a man still to be convinced of the evil of his ways, and yet still to continue in those ways, is an argument of a trifling soul, which hath never yet sincerely set itself to seek God or its own salvation.

5. The last head I shall treat of, as an occasion of men's deceits about the terms of their salvation, is this, the misinterpreting and misapplying some words and phrases of scripture, which do summarily express

the duties required of us in order to our attaining everlasting happiness, in such a manner as to make them consist with a careless or wicked life.

There are abundance of instances to be given under this head: but I shall here only take notice of those two famous things by which the writers of the New Testament are every where accustomed to express the whole of a Christian's duty. Sometimes in that book all that Christ and his apostles are said to require of men, in order to their future happiness, is only a true faith; and sometimes only repentance. Thus, as for faith, our Saviour saith, that *whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but whosoever believeth not shall be damned*, Mark xvi. 16. St. Paul tells us over and over again, that *by faith only we are justified*, Rom. iii. 28. v. 1, &c. The consequence now that is drawn from hence is, that whosoever hath true faith shall certainly be saved, supposing that he die in that condition; and indeed this is undeniably true, as true as the gospel is. But now abundance of men have such a notion of true faith as may very well consist with a bad life; for it is in their account either a bare believing of the truths of the gospel, or a believing as the true catholic church (for so the papists call the church of Rome) believes, or a resting and reliance upon Christ, and him only, without any merits of their own, or such an application of Christ's righteousness and merits to themselves in particular, as that they are persuaded they are the elect of God, and that all the promises of the gospel do belong to themselves. I pray now consider how easy it is for a man to have any of these kinds of faith, and yet continue to be a wicked man. And it is evident, that the gene-

rality of Christians in the world have no other notion of faith but what may be reduced to some one of these four which I have now named.

Thus again ; sometimes all that is required in the gospel to our salvation is expressed by the word *repentance*: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*, Matt. iii. 2. *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*, Luke xiii. 3, 5. *Repent, and be baptized for the remission of your sins*, Acts ii. 38. *Whensoever a sinner repents he shall find mercy*, &c. But now how easy a matter is it, as things are commonly apprehended, for any man among us to have true repentance? I pray what do most men take repentance to be, but this; a being heartily sorry when we have done amiss, and wishing we had not done it? and indeed the word imports no more in our English language. Every man who hath done a thing which he is sorry for, and wishes was undone, may be truly said to repent of it, as we use the word. Now since it is plain that the holy scriptures require no more of any man, in order to his salvation, but either faith, or repentance, or, at most, faith and repentance together, how easy is it for any man, though otherwise very bad and wicked in his life, upon very slender grounds to believe that he hath both these qualities? For who can hinder such a man, when he finds in himself that he believes the gospel, and is heartily desirous to enjoy all the benefits of Christ's passion, and is sorry for his sins past, and wishes that he had lived a better life, and purposes to do so for the future; (nay, and dies with those resolutions;) I say, who can hinder such a man from having an expectation of all the mercies of God that are made over to true believers and true penitents in the gospel?

All this is very true : but then these people run upon this great mistake all the while, and they ought frequently to be put in mind of it, viz. that they apply these words, *faith* and *repentance*, to quite other purposes than the scripture designed them ; they construe them in a quite different sense and meaning than they were intended. For certainly the scripture justifying faith, as appears by undeniable arguments, is only such a faith as, together with the belief of Jesus Christ, produceth a new creature. And certainly the scripture repentance is only such a repentance as, together with the being sorry for our sins, produceth a thorough reformation of our manners. Now, wherever these two things are effected, that man is sure of going to heaven ; but if either of these be wanting, the man has only the sound of the words for his title to heaven, but he wants that which is the true meaning of them.

This, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter : *Whoever doeth righteousness is righteous ; and therefore let no man deceive you.* It is in vain to think of any other method of going to heaven but the plain, common way, that is as old as mankind, and bears date with the first discovery of God's will to them : and that is nothing else but a holy, virtuous, religious life ; a hearty fear and love and trust in God ; a sincere belief of all his revelations ; and together with that, a suitable conversation in all sobriety and righteousness and godliness : this is to be *righteous as Christ is righteous* ; and without this, all our other speculations and contrivances for the securing our future state will prove perfectly vain and ineffectual.

The thing is so plain, that we are very unthinking

creatures, if ever we be deceived as to this matter ; especially since we have so many cautions given us by Jesus Christ and his apostles not to suffer ourselves to *be deceived with any vain words*, Eph. v. 6. But and if we will be deceived, yet nevertheless (as the apostle tells us) *God will not be mocked*, Galat. vi. 7: there are no tricks to be put upon him, he easily sees through all our disguises ; he knows whether our heart is right towards him in all things, or whether we would impose upon him by some little device that we have learned from the party we converse with, to get to heaven in a more compendious, expeditious, cheaper way than what the gospel teaches ; *all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do*, Heb. iv. 13. and the rule he hath set to himself in his dealings with mankind, and from which he will never depart, (as the apostle tells us,) is none other than this, *To reward every man according to his deeds : to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life : but to them who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile ; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile : for there is no respect of persons with God*, Rom. ii. 6—11.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE QUEEN ANNE, 1707.

2 TIMOTHY i. 10.

—*who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

SEE here two of the happy and glorious effects of our Saviour's undertaking for us. By his death he *hath abolished death*; and by his resurrection from the dead *he hath brought life and immortality to light*. But how are we to understand this saying, that Christ *hath abolished death*? do not all men yet die? and doth not St. Paul say, that *the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*? 1 Cor. xv. 26. This is true; but yet the power and dominion of death, as to all faithful Christians, is long ago abolished and destroyed by our Saviour; and that is all that is meant here. St. Paul in his writings usually speaks of death as of a person, as of some mighty conqueror, who had gained an universal empire over mankind; as in truth all mankind, by reason of their sins, were obnoxious for ever to be held in captivity by it. But now Christ by his death hath vanquished this enemy, hath broken those chains, and set us free from that perpetual vassalage: so that death shall not from henceforth have dominion over us; but we have at this present, through the merit's of Christ's sufferings, an actual

right to another life ; and when we leave this world (if we persevere in the faith of Christ) shall be put into an actual possession of it. And that is the full meaning of this expression of Christ's *abolishing death*.

As for the other part of the text, upon which I mean to dwell at this time, namely, Christ's *bringing life and immortality to light by the gospel*, the meaning of that I take to be this ; viz. that Christ by his gospel hath made a much clearer revelation, and by his resurrection from the dead given a much stronger demonstration of a future life and immortality, than ever the world had before.

We do not think that the people of God before our Saviour's appearance were altogether ignorant of this truth, for there is no doubt but the patriarchs of old, and all the pious Jews who lived to our Saviour's time, did expect and hope for a heavenly country after this life ; and looked upon themselves only *as strangers and pilgrims in this world*, Heb. xi. 13. Nay, it is very certain that the better sort of heathens were not without some comfortable glimpses and presages of a happy state after this ; and several of the philosophers spake great and excellent things concerning it. But yet, notwithstanding this, the promises of eternal life in the Old Testament were so obscure, and the discourses of the wisest men among the heathens were so wholly conjectural, that we may truly say that all the notices they had of this business were but in a manner darkness, in comparison of that exceeding clear light that Christ brought into the world. And therefore it is with reason said by the apostle here, that *he brought life and immortality to light by the gospel* ;

because when it was obscure and dark before, he brought it into a clear and perfect light.

Two things I shall do upon this subject :

First of all, display some of that light which Christ by his gospel brought into the world about this matter.

And, secondly, give some account of that *life and immortality which he thus brought to light*: that so when both the evidence of the truth of the thing, and likewise the importance and invaluableness of the blessing it contains in it, lie before us, we may be persuaded most earnestly to set about the obtaining our share in this life and immortality which is made over to mankind by our Lord Jesus.

I. I begin with the evidence that the gospel gives us concerning this life, or the Christian way of demonstrating that there is another world. This is not a slight point, but of the greatest importance imaginable. And however we are taught from our infancy to believe it, yet it will concern us all, if ever we mean to live virtuously and comfortably, and to bear up against all the temptations, and ruffles, and disturbances, and afflictions which the circumstances of our condition in this world will necessarily expose us to ; I say, it will concern us above all things to be thoroughly satisfied of the grounds and reasons upon which we do believe a future state of immortality. For we may assure ourselves, when all is done, there is no such security of our virtue, no such preservative against temptations, no such support under any kind of discouragements we meet with, as a firm, rational, well-grounded persuasion of another life.

It is very true, that reason and natural light will

furnish a man who is thoughtful and inquisitive with abundance of arguments, from whence he may conclude that in all probability God designed mankind to be immortal, and that good men shall actually be so. Such arguments, for instance, are, the nature of our souls, and their faculties; the strong appetites and desires which are woven into all men's constitutions to live for ever, which the better and wiser any man grows, the more strong he finds them in himself; the fears and presages that wicked men have of a future judgment; the necessity of rewards and punishments, in order both to the making men virtuous, and to the vindicating the justice of God's providence in the distribution of things in this world. All these, I say, are good proofs to a thinking, contemplative mind, that there is to be another state after this, wherein good men shall be rewarded, and wicked men punished. But yet, notwithstanding, we see by sufficient experience, that the greatest part of mankind are not much capable of being wrought upon by such abstracted arguments; nay, we see the wisest and most considerate men in the world, after all their inquiries and speculations, before our Saviour's time, did but very little towards convincing mankind of the certainty of these things, how firmly soever they might believe them themselves. So that we have need of another sort of arguments, another kind of demonstration, for the clearing and ascertaining these points to us, and rendering them useful and operative as to the conduct of our lives. And this is that we say our Lord Jesus gave us by his gospel, and particularly by his resurrection from the dead.

The truth is, life and immortality are things per-

fectly in God's disposal, and it depends entirely on his pleasure whether he will bestow them upon mankind or no. Now though, as I have said before, we have a great many arguments drawn from the wisdom and justice and goodness of God, the nature and faculties of our own souls, that may render it very credible that God will make good men immortally happy in another state; yet we cannot be so certain of this, unless it should please God, by some authentic messenger, to assure us that he would do so. One such revelation of God's will, well attested, would be worth an hundred speculative, metaphysical arguments for the convincing us about this matter. And such a messenger God hath sent; such a revelation he hath given us; viz. by our Lord Jesus, who came down from God as a public ambassador to all the world. And one of the great ends of his coming was to assure all mankind, in the name of God, that there was *life and immortality* to be had in another world, and not only so, but to teach them the certain way how they might all arrive to it. He left those mansions of bliss to bring us the happy tidings of them, and withal to assure us, that they were in his own disposal, and that *whosoever believed in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*, John iii. 16. This indeed was the main argument of all his discourses, and it is the main argument of the gospel.

Now that our Saviour affirmed nothing in this matter but what is true, and promised no more to his disciples than what he was able to make good, and would do so in due time, we have all the evidence imaginable.

For, 1, he was a person who of all the men in

the world one would have the least suspicion of that he was a deceiver, though he had given no other confirmation at all of his doctrine than only the goodness and innocence of his own life.

No person ever appeared in the world of so much goodness, of such exemplary virtues and holiness as he was owner of. But among all his virtues his simplicity and integrity were so conspicuous, that it was almost impossible to imagine that he could carry on any other design in the world than only to do good to mankind.

2. There was no just exception to be taken at any of his doctrines, they being all pure and heavenly, such as were worthy of God and agreeable to the principles of men's minds, and tended much to the making the world both better and happier. Which consideration adds a great degree of credibility to what he delivered in this matter we are speaking of.

3. That he intended not to impose upon others as to this point of a future life, but did himself verily believe the truth of what he taught, we have this undeniable argument; viz. that he freely and willingly laid down his life for the confirmation of it; which he would never have done, had he not firmly believed he should be rewarded in another world. This he himself tells us, that *he laid down his life, that he might take it up again*, John x. 17.

4. That he was not mistaken in what he believed himself, and what he taught others to believe, is evident from the divine and wonderful works which he wrought throughout the whole course of his ministry for the confirmation of his doctrine; particularly his raising up several persons from death to

life. These were the credentials he shewed for his commission to preach this doctrine; these were the seal that God set to the truth of what he delivered. It had been utterly inconsistent with the veracity of God, and he had brought an invincible temptation upon mankind to believe a falsehood, if he had suffered our Saviour to have wrought these unheard-of miracles, when he professed likewise to work them for the attestation of his doctrine, if this doctrine had not been true; especially considering likewise, that it was a doctrine which, as I said before, no man, in point of reason or credibility, had any just exceptions against.

5. But the fullest demonstration of this truth that could possibly be given, was his own resurrection from the grave, and his visible ascension into heaven, in the presence of many spectators, forty days after.

(1.) For, first of all, herein is plainly proved the possibility of our resurrection from the dead, and that we mortal creatures who live on the earth are capable of being carried up into heaven, there to dwell for ever; for that cannot be impossible which hath once been certainly and in fact done.

(2.) And, secondly, Christ's resurrection doth not only prove the possibility of ours, but also shew that we shall certainly rise again, and live for ever in a happy state in heaven, as he doth now. For hereby was demonstrated, beyond all contradiction, the truth of all his doctrines, and therefore consequently of that which he taught concerning the other world. If this had not been true, that we shall live for ever by him, (as he hath promised us,) God would have never raised him up to life again, to deceive us a second time, and in so material a thing. But seeing

God did not leave his soul in hell, Acts ii. 27. 31. but *exalted him* to a glorious life, even to *sit at his right hand*, ch. ii. 33. and ch. v. 31. in the fulness of power and dignity; this is an undeniable argument, that they *who believe in him* shall not perish neither, but *be raised again as he was*, John vi. 40; because he who had so confidently before his death told his disciples that he would thus rise again in three days, did with the same confidence declare to them, that he would raise them also, and bestow upon them everlasting life. Now the first being certainly brought to pass by the power of God, who alone could do it, there can be no doubt but the other will be made good in due time.

6. But, lastly, to all this let me add the testimony of the apostles and disciples of Christ, who, after his death, and ascension into heaven, went about the world preaching the truth of their Master's doctrines, and particularly of this article of the life to come. All of these were so fully persuaded of *the glory that was to be revealed*, 1 Peter v. 1. that they travelled into all countries to publish these glad tidings, and to bring over all mankind to the belief of Jesus, and to a hope of eternal life through him. And God was pleased to work with them, and to confirm the truth of what they preached, by mighty signs and wonders; so that they themselves, as well as our Saviour, gave ocular demonstration of another life, by raising the dead, and doing all those great things over again that he had done before them. And that none might suspect this to be an imposture, they at length most of them laid down their lives to attest the sincerity of their faith as to this point.

And now can we require greater or stronger evi-

dence for the truth of any thing that doth not fall under our senses, than we have given of the life to come? Certainly, whoever among us is an infidel in this point, after such evident demonstrations as our Saviour and his apostles have given of the truth of it, shews himself to want sense and judgment, as well as goodness.

Ay, but the infidel may say, all the force of these arguments depends upon the truth of the historical matters of fact that have been insisted on. But how shall we, who live at so great a distance of time, know that there ever was such a person in the world as Jesus Christ, or that he preached such doctrines, or that he wrought such miracles to confirm them, or that he rose from the dead, or that he gave such power to his disciples after him to do those wonderful things? I answer, we may know and be assured of all these things by the same evidence, nay, much better, than we know that there was such a person as Julius Cæsar, and that he obtained such victories, and made such alterations in the government of Rome, and did such other famous acts as are recorded of him. We none of us bore witness to these transactions, but yet we firmly believe them upon the credit of authentic history and universal, uncontrolled tradition, and the permanent effects which followed upon those actions. Upon the same ground therefore, and for the same reason, we cannot refuse our assent to all that the sacred history relates of our Saviour and his apostles, it having all the marks of an authentic history upon it, and being backed with the concurrent testimony of other writings in every age since that. And, which is more, having at this day standing proofs to give

credit to it from the wonderful alterations and effects which followed upon these things in the world at the time they were done, and continue visible in this very age all the world over. So that in truth there can be no exception made against the scripture history, but what may be made against any history in the world : nay, I dare be bold to say, we have an hundred times greater and stronger evidence for the truth of the history of our Saviour, as delivered in the New Testament, than we have for the truth of any history in the world ; that is, of things or persons at the same distance from us.

Blessed therefore be God, who hath made us acquainted with the gospel of his Son, and given us such undeniable evidence for the historical truth of it. And blessed be our Lord Jesus, who hath in that gospel *brought life and immortality* to such a certain and perfect light. That very thing alone, though there was nothing else to be said for the Christian revelation, would sufficiently justify both the gospel itself and our Lord Jesus the author of it, to all mankind ; nay, and effectually recommend his religion, above all others that ever were taught, to all persons in all nations of the world. This is our glory, and the privilege of our religion, that Christ alone hath brought certain tidings of another life. He alone hath ascertained mankind of that great, important proposition, concerning which they were in an uncertainty before, viz. that *verily there is a reward for the righteous : doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth*, Psalm lviii. 11. Our Lord Jesus hath not only told us this, but he hath proved it undeniably, and beyond all exception, by raising himself from the dead, and taking possession of the

kingdom of heaven by that same Spirit of his, which he hath assured us shall raise us up also one day, and carry us to that blessed place where he now reigns in glory.

O happy tidings ! O glorious gospel ! Christ Jesus is come from heaven to demonstrate that point which puzzled all the wits of the world before. Christ hath *brought life and immortality to light by the gospel*. Christ hath *begotten us again to a lively hope, by his resurrection from the dead*, 1 Pet. i. 3. He hath shewed us that there is a happy, glorious state to be attained in heaven after our short labours here. He hath directed us likewise most plainly and certainly in the way and methods by which we may attain to it : and he himself is gone before us to take possession of it in our name and in our behalf, and to prepare mansions for us against the time he comes and fetches us thither. O what support is here to our faith ! what encouragement is here to our hopes ! what obligation is here to our obedience ! what an irresistible argument is here given us to break loose from our sins and our vicious conversation, and from henceforward to devote ourselves entirely to the service of Jesus Christ our great Lord and Master, who hath done so abundantly for us *above what we could ask or think*, Eph. iii. 20.

These are the inferences, this is the use and application we ought to make to ourselves of this great point ; and which will appear more reasonable, if we attend a little, in the second place, to the mighty and invaluable blessings that are contained in that *life and immortality which Christ hath brought to light through the gospel*.

II. What is this life and immortality ? Certainly

it is not barely living for ever without any danger of dying any more ; for, in truth, if the immortal life hereafter were not better and happier than the mortal life is, generally speaking, in this world, I know no such reason why we should be so very desirous of it, or solicitous about it. But God hath made better, infinitely better provisions for us. The truth is, the life we here lead, though we call it life, may rather, for the most part, be called a continual dying ; because the most of us feel and experience a great deal more of pain and uneasiness, and restlessness, and vexation in it, than we do of true solid joy and pleasure and satisfaction. But to live truly is to live happily. This is the sense of all men, and this is the language of scripture. We may as justly draw a comparison between the state of infancy and the state of grown men, between sickness and health, between poverty and nakedness and the greatest plenty and affluence of the most prosperous condition, as we can between the life we now lead, and the life that good men shall live in the world to come.

The life and immortality which Christ hath brought to light, and which he hath promised to all his faithful disciples, is a comprehension of the greatest blessings that the tongue of man can express, or the heart of man conceive. It is to be translated from a state of dulness and anxiety, trouble, affliction, disappointments, vexations, real grief, solid cares, and but imaginary pleasures, to a state of true happiness and content, and manly and rational pleasures ; pleasures not interrupted by sickness or any sad accidents, not dulled by being weary of them or cloyed with them, not disturbed either by the insults of our enemies, or the concernments for our

miserable friends, or our own inequality of temper.

It is to have all the powers and faculties of our souls advanced to the highest perfection that they are capable of. So that our understandings will be perfected by the knowledge of the best things, and our wills by the love of them. And we shall live in perfect ease and peace, in perfect freedom and liberty, in a perfect enjoyment of ourselves, and the greatest good we can be partakers of, and that in the most perfect ways.

It is to have our bodies that slept in the dust raised again and united to our souls; no longer gross, fleshly, corruptible bodies, but spiritual, heavenly, immortal ones, *fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, in which he now sits at God's right hand*, Phil. iii. 21. Rom. viii. 24.

It is to live *in the city of the great King*, Matt. v. 35. *the heavenly Jerusalem*, Heb. xii. 22. a paradise of pleasure, a country of perpetual light and bliss, where the *glory of the Lord fills the place*, and where every object that presents itself adds a new beauty to it, and contributes to the increase of our delight. It is to spend our days in the most noble and agreeable employments, in viewing and contemplating all the various works of God, in admiring the wonderful contrivance of his Providence in all ages, in adoring his infinite love to the sons of men, in reflecting upon our own inexpressible happiness that ariseth from his communications to us, and in singing hymns of praise and joy and triumph to him and to our Lord Jesus upon account of all these things.

It is to dwell in a place where there are no ob-

jects of pity or compassion, of anger or hatred, or distrust, every person there being as happy as we can wish, and all increasing the happiness of each other, by the entire love and kindness and friendship that is maintained among them.

Lastly, it is to be with Jesus Christ, and to behold all his glory, and to live for ever seeing and enjoying the great God Almighty, *in whose presence is the fulness of joy; and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore*, Ps. xvi. 11. These are the things, in short, which go to the making up that life which Christ hath *brought to light by his gospel*.

I have nothing to add more to this description, but what the term of *immortality*, that is here added to it, doth naturally bring to our thoughts. Let us therefore consider a little what that word contains in it.

Our life, if we be sincere Christians, shall be unspeakably glorious and happy. But that which adds the crown to all the rest is, that it shall be an immortal life; a life without danger of dying; a happiness without danger of losing: as it will be blessedness in perfection, so it will be blessedness without end. For this is the *everlasting life* that our Saviour hath so often promised. This is *the inheritance, immortal, undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens*, as St. Peter speaks, 1 Pet. i. 4. It is *a kingdom which cannot be shaken; a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*, as St. Paul speaks, 2 Cor. v. 1. Innumerable ages shall never put a period to it: but after all the ages we can conceive; nay, though we were millions of ages adding numbers to numbers,

yet, after all those ages so numbered or past, good men shall be then as glorious, as happy, as full of love, joy, and peace, as they were the first moment they entered upon that state; nay, and very probably a great many degrees more happy, more glorious, more wise and knowing, more full of love and joy and peace, than they were at the beginning. For God is an infinite good; and we can never come to the end of his perfections, because they are infinite, like himself. But the longer we live, and we shall live for ever, the more we shall discover of them; and the more we do discover, the more we shall understand; the more we understand, the more we shall love; the more we understand and love, the more we shall enjoy, and the greater will our happiness be, and so from ages to ages.

O what shall we return unto the Lord for all his benefits! Let us love him heartily, serve him diligently, devote ourselves entirely to do the work that he hath sent us into the world to do. Let us mortify all our carnal, worldly, vicious affections, and at last grow out of love with the insipid, dull gratifications of this sensual life, and breathe and pant after that glorious *life and immortality* that awaits us in another world. Let us think from whom we came, and what we came hither for; and what a noble work we are put upon; and what a glorious issue and conclusion we may expect, if we be faithful in it. And let us every day praise God, who hath prepared so great things for us; and our Lord Jesus, who hath made known to us the certainty of them, and taught us the way how we may attain them.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE QUEEN ANNE, 1708.

PSALM cxix. 59, 60.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

THE following week, which we commonly call Passion-week, being, of all the time of Lent, more especially set apart for the purposes of religion and devotion, for the examining the state of our souls, and exercising acts of repentance, that by deeply considering what bitter things our Saviour suffered for our sakes, we may be brought to an abhorrence of them, and enter into resolutions of forsaking them for ever, and so devote ourselves anew to God on Easter-day by coming to his table; I say, this being the business of this week, I do not know how I can more usefully spend this half hour, than by endeavouring to excite you all to the imitation of this practice of holy David, which you find in the words which I have read unto you. And since there is no difficulty, either in the expression or in the sense of my text, that needs any explaining, I shall apply myself, without more ado, to the thing I design.

I hope there are few of you here present, but have so far, with the Psalmist, *thought upon your ways*, that if you have not already *turned your feet*

unto God's testimonies; (as he here expresseth it;) if you have not already set yourselves to serve God, and to mind the work of religion, yet you are fully convinced, that some time or other you must do it, if you mean not to perish everlastingly; nay, I doubt not but you heartily purpose and resolve, that if God grant you life and health you will do it. But now why should you not presently put these purposes in execution? Why should you not with David here *make haste*, and without further delay apply your minds and study to *the keeping of God's commandments*? Why should you not immediately break loose from the sins which hold you in captivity, and *give all diligence*, by a strict, sober, virtuous and devout life, *to make your calling and election sure*? (as the apostle expresses it, 2 Peter i. 10.) *that so*, when you come to die, *an entrance may be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus*? ver. 11. Let me therefore, this day, call upon you in the name of God, now while he affords you health and strength, let me exhort you to follow David's example in the text, *to make haste, and delay not to keep God's commandments*.

For the more effectual stirring you up to this, give me leave to represent four things to you, which I shall make the heads of my exhortation.

I. First of all; pray let it be considered, that the longer you delay this work, still the more difficult it will be to you, and the more labour and pains you will be put to, if ever you prosecute it successfully. This all the world must acknowledge to be true, upon these two accounts.

1st, The longer you defer this matter, the more

unfit you are to undertake it ; and, 2dly, the work still grows greater upon your hands.

1. First of all, the longer you defer this work, the more unfit you render yourselves for the performance of it. For it is here as in all other arts and habits that are to be acquired by exercise and application of mind, the longer we put off any design of that nature, the greater unfitness and incapacity we shall find, even in our natural powers, for the compassing of it. One cannot be thought so capable of becoming a learned man, who begins to study at the age of thirty or forty, as he who hath applied his mind to learning from his childhood. The faculties of a man's soul are in a constant flux, and the nature of them is such, that the more early we exercise them about any thing, the more prompt we shall find them in it, and the less trouble we shall have in keeping them to it. It just fares with them as with those that learn music. The younger they are when they begin with that art, the more pliable and nimble their fingers are in touching their instrument : but if they stay till their sinews are knit, they will find them much more stiff and unmanageable. How slight soever the comparison is, yet it truly sets forth the state of the powers of mankind, as to the great work of religion. The longer we delay the employing our faculties that way, the more unfit they will be for it ; and especially if we neglect the thing so long that nature begins to decline, and the heat and briskness of our spirits do abate. In this case it will be a very hard tug for us to make the powers of our souls in any tolerable degree serviceable to us for the work of religion, in case we have not laid out ourselves in that

way before. To which we add further, that all those things which do now indispose us, and render us unfit for the service of God, will more and more do so every day, and consequently we are every day less capable of undertaking the work. Whatsoever is a hinderance of that work to-day, will be so to-morrow, and a greater too. For the longer any of us gives way to any evil affection, or any sinful custom, still the stronger it grows upon us, and still more untoward and incapable we are of receiving contrary impressions. Let no man flatter himself therefore with such thoughts as these: I am now indisposed for the pursuing virtue, and living religiously; I have other inclinations, which at present carry away my thoughts and designs, and I cannot easily break loose from them. But I hope in God I shall, some time or other, be in a better humour, and then I will be good, then I will serve God. O man, do not deceive thyself with these vain imaginations! If thou be'st not in humour to be good to-day, thou wilt much less be so to-morrow. For thou wilt always have the same inclinations or affections, or others as bad, to hinder thee, and by thy delays to give check to them they still grow stronger, and thou growest weaker. In truth, he that defers the amendment of his manners, though it be but for an hour, upon account of his present unfitness, is just in the case of that silly countryman (it is the comparison of an heathen poet) that had a great mind to go over a river, but would stay upon the bank till all the water of it was run out. But there, alas! he may for ever stay, for the river runs on, and will always continue so to do, and possibly with a greater flood.

2. But, secondly, as all delays in this business of keeping God's commandments make us more unfit to go about it, so do they also render the work itself much greater, and consequently more difficult to be performed. It is in this case as with a man who being bound for a certain place, instead of going the direct way that leads to it, steers his course the quite contrary. Now such a man, if ever he comes to his journey's end, must not only travel through all those stages, which, if he had taken the direct road, must have been passed by him in order to the arriving where he would be, but he must also tread over again all those steps that he went wrong ; so that by this means you see he hath made his journey much longer than otherwise it would have been, and so much the longer by how much the further he hath gone out of the way. We are all of us in this life upon a journey : the place whither we are bound is the kingdom of heaven : the only way that leads thither is a life of virtue and holiness : opposite to this is a course of vice and sin, as being the road that leads to hell and destruction. All of us now that pursue this latter course, the further we go in it the more we are out of the way, and consequently the more steps have we to make, the more toil and travel to undergo, if ever we come to our journey's end. This then is all the benefit we reap by continuing on in a course of sin : some time or other we must repent ; and the longer we delay it, we have very comfortably heaped up to ourselves so many more and more grievous sins to repent of. And who, alas ! but he who feels it, can express the insupportable weight and load that a continued course of sins, with all their aggravating circum-

stances, doth lay upon the conscience of a man when it is once seriously awakened. We must all get virtuous habits sooner or later. But by putting the work still off, we have done ourselves this kindness, that the effecting of it will cost us ten times the pains that it would have done, had we begun then when we were first convinced that it was our duty to do it. Where then is the wisdom to defer these things; to multiply our work to that degree that it may perhaps exceed our utmost strength to perform it; to lay such burdens upon our shoulders as will possibly endanger the breaking of them. O therefore, let us think, whenever we are tempted to commit a sin, Why should I do this action, which, if ever I come to repent of, (and I must repent of it, if ever I mean to go to heaven,) will cost me sorrow and trouble more than enough? Whenever God puts good thoughts into our hearts, let us say to ourselves, Why should I not now pursue these holy motions, and bring them to some effect? It is certain, if I do it not at all, I am undone; and if I put the thing off till another time, it will be much more difficult for me to do it. O that we were as wise in these our great concernments as we are in every little, trifling business of this world; we might save ourselves God knows how much labour and trouble, which otherwise will unavoidably come upon us, or else that which is a thousand times worse!

II. But to proceed to a second argument, wherewith I would enforce the practice of the text. Easiness and quickness of despatch is not the only convenience of setting presently upon the work of religion, as neither is the increasing our labour and the difficulty of the work the only inconvenience of de-

laying it ; but further, let it be considered, that by making haste to keep God's commandments, as David here did, we mightily consult the pleasure and comfort of our following days, as, on the contrary, by delaying it we necessarily prepare fears and disquietude and unavoidable anxieties of mind all our life after. He who long pursues a vicious course, and returns not till the latter end of his days, must never expect either to live or die in so great peace, or so assured a prospect of being happy in the other world, though he be never so diligent and sincere in his religion, as he who begins betimes. All his hopes will be mingled with sad fears of his condition ; the sense of the many grievous sins of his life so long persisted in will still be afflicting his conscience, and he will still be doubtful whether he hath sufficiently repented of them, and whether God hath received him to favour. As he must take greater pains in the working out his salvation than those who engaged early in the business, so must he do it likewise with greater fear and trembling ; nay, it may be, he will not be freed from his doubts and perplexities till he finds himself in another state.

This is the unavoidable consequence of putting off the business of religion till our latter days. Why, therefore, should we not now begin to live so, as when we come to be old, if ever we be so, we shall wish we had lived ? Why should we not now, in our vigour and strength, make some provisions wherewith to sustain and support ourselves under the burden and infirmities of old age ? Why should we, by our present trifling, render the remainder of our life solicitous and uncomfortable, if not full of disquiet, distraction, and amazement ? O let us now

imagine what kind of thoughts we shall have when we come to die! How shall we then wish that we had served God, and given up ourselves to virtue and piety even from our childhood! How shall we regret every year and every day that we have lavished away in pleasure, or in idleness, or in worldliness, or any other way, to the neglect of our spiritual concerns! The more haste we make to be good, the more shall we then thank God and ourselves for it. But all delay, according to the degree of it, will increase our trouble, and render our everlasting condition more doubtful and unsecure, at least to our own apprehension.

III. Let it be further considered, that, by *making haste without delay to keep God's commandments*, we do not only more consult the comfort and happiness of our following days, but also our happiness in the future state, which will be so much the greater, by how much the earlier we begun to be religious. This is my third argument wherewith I would press this point upon you.—It is a known truth, that all who are happy in the other world are not equally happy; but there are several degrees of glory there, as *one star differeth from another star in glory*, 1 Cor. xv. 41. which is the apostle's comparison. The righteous Judge of the world proportioneth every man's reward to his work; and therefore they who have more retained their innocence in this life, they who have spent more of their time in the service of God, and have been guilty of fewer crimes and interruptions in their duty, and have made greater progress and advancement in all Christian graces and virtues, these will receive a far more glorious crown in the day of judgment, than they who have misemployed

the greatest part of their time and their talents in a course of vanity and sin, and do at last return to wisdom and sobriety. It is not to be imagined, according to the common rules of equity, (though we had no divine revelation for it, as yet we have very clearly,) that such as have served their lusts, and done the drudgery of Satan for the greatest part of their lives, and at last, when their natural heat and vigour is spent, do change their master, and list themselves into the service of our Lord Jesus; (though we suppose they are accepted, as being sincere in their repentance, though it was late begun;) yet, I say, it cannot be imagined but they will fall extremely short, as to the degree of their happiness, of those who devoted the best of their strength and of their time to God.

This consideration, though it doth concern all men whatsoever, yet doth it in an especial manner concern young persons, such as have a great deal of time before them, as we commonly speak. O how happy would it be for such, if they would seriously lay this matter to heart, before either a habit of carelessness or sensuality or worldly-mindedness hath got possession of them! Such persons have yet their fortunes to make, both for this world and the other. What success they may meet with, as to their worldly concernments, be they never so diligent in their business, I dare not answer for. For in this world, as Solomon has told us, *the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the man of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all*, Eccles. ix. 11. But then, as to their concernments in the other world, that is not so

doubtful a business ; for I dare positively pronounce to them, that they have now such opportunities put into their hands, that if they do make use of them, and improve them as they should, they cannot fail of laying up to themselves a great stock both of virtue here, and of glory and happiness hereafter : far greater than that of those who spend the first part of their life loosely and carelessly, and afterward begin to bethink themselves, and entertain better counsels, all along supposing that they continue equally diligent. However they may fail of their worldly aims and designs, yet they can never be disappointed as to this. We say, and we say truly, Happy is the man who at any time of his life doth seriously apply himself to virtue and goodness ; yet it must be owned by all, that much more happy is he who hath walked in the paths of virtue from his childhood, and hath never made any great wounds in his conscience, by going astray from his heavenly Father in any gross instances, but hath all along pursued the ways of God with care and industry from the time that he was first made acquainted with them. O what a vast treasure of glory and reward may such a one by his diligence purchase to himself above other men ! and thus much of my third argument. But if all this will not prevail upon us to enter into a consideration of our ways, and without further delay apply ourselves to *the keeping God's commandments* ;

IV. Let me, in the last place, beg of you to consider the infinite hazard we all run by neglecting this work, upon account of the great uncertainty of our present lives. We have but such a determinate term allotted to us for the doing our great work in. And

this term, at the largest computation, can extend no further than the time of our lives. And yet is not this time of our lives infinitely uncertain? Are any of us sure we shall be alive a month hence? Have we not almost every day instances presented to us of those who are snatched away by a sudden and unexpected death? Have we not heard of a great many, who in all appearance were as sound and healthful as ourselves, and dreamed no more of dying than we do now, who have yet almost in the twinkling of an eye been carried off by an apoplexy, or a fever, or a stroke of an enemy, or the assault of robbers, or some other unavoidable casualty? There are a thousand ways to let out life in a moment; and it is not in the power of the most sagacious prudence either to foresee or to prevent one of them. Who then, that is in his wits, will, upon the presumption that he shall live many years, nay, that he live many weeks longer, put off a business of such vast concernment to him, that if it be not timely taken care of, he is utterly undone to all purposes for evermore?

Give me leave to dwell a little upon this argument, and to press it upon you as warmly as I can, and that shall serve for my application at this time.

Since, my brethren, upon this short, this uncertain life, depends our eternal fortune in the next world, how infinitely doth it concern us to trifle no longer! Methinks the very thoughts of this, that upon this single point (for life is but a point, a moment in comparison of eternity) depends our life for evermore, should awaken the most stupid insensible man out of his deep sleep of carelessness and sensuality, to a quick and pungent sense of his ever-

lasting interests. Must we be eternally saved or damned by what we do here, and is it not high time for us to begin to look after our own condition? Shall we let day after day, year after year, pass over our heads, and we all the time think of nothing but the present? design nothing but just how to live easily here? nay, perhaps, only how to spend that single day which lies so upon our hands, that we are at a loss for the employing of it? Why, fools that we are, our sand runs on; it runs apace all this while that we are a doing nothing; and we know not how soon the glass will be out. And when it is out, good God! what follows? Why, eternity; a bottomless gulph of infinity; that which will never have an end; that which is never capable of a change or alteration. Can we think of this, and sit still? Is our day, that fatal, dreadful day of death, so certainly, nay, perhaps, so suddenly a coming, and can we live unconcerned? Can we *fold our arms*, and say *with the sluggard*, *Yet a little sleep, yet a little slumber?* Prov. vi. 10. Let us yet a little enjoy ourselves, and cast care behind us? Why, methinks the sound of every passing-bell should alarm us: we should not be able to hear that any of our acquaintance, or any of the neighbourhood is carried off, but it should strike us to the heart, and put us upon reflecting, Lord, in what a sad condition should I be, if this had been now my case! Whatever company we were in, or whatever business we had upon our hands; whatever designs of worldly profit or advantage we were a pursuing, or whatever pleasures or divertisements we had prepared to ourselves; yet, methinks, it should be sufficient to blast all these, and to spoil all the content and satisfaction we could

expect from them, to have but such a thought as this to come into our minds; “ Ay, this would be
“ very well, if it would last always: but, alas! I
“ must be gone, miserable man that I am, I must
“ be gone, and leave all these things behind me: I
“ must be gone to my long home, where I must
“ live for ever, either a perfectly happy man, or the
“ most wretched creature in the world. And God
“ knows which of them will be my lot; I may prove
“ the latter; I may experience what it is to live
“ with everlasting burnings. But as to the former,
“ the state of happiness, that I have made no pro-
“ vision for, but have all my work yet to do.” O
how killing and unsupportable is such a thought as
this! One would think that the reflection upon it
would keep us from giving any rest to our heads or
any slumber to our eyes, till we had made some
steps towards the securing our everlasting concern-
ments.

But, alas! we are not much given to think upon
these things; we are a trifling sort of creatures, that
love to put the evil day far from us, and to enjoy
the present. Let us live to-day; let who will take
care of what comes after. Let us be rich; let us ap-
pear somebody in the world; let us live at ease; let
us enjoy ourselves and our friends, and let damna-
tion, if it will, come at the conclusion.

O foolish and insensible creatures that we are! Is
it thus that we employ our noble faculties of reason
and understanding? Is this the use we make of all
God’s kindness and longsuffering, of all those means
he affords us for our good? Yes, this: no better
than this, to our shame be it spoken! God, out of
pure kindness, gave us our beings, and sent us hither

for no other end, but that after a short and tolerably comfortable life here, we shall live with him in eternal blessedness hereafter. Accordingly he has not been wanting in any thing that might minister to these purposes. He doth afford us health, and strength, and reason, and conscience, and memory, for the carrying on this great work ; he orders all the creatures of the visible world to be at our service while we are a doing it. The sun fails not to give his light : the earth fails not to yield her fruits of increase : the beasts, the fowls, the fishes, the whole creation doth daily minister to our supports and conveniences and delights : nay, the inhabitants of the invisible world think not themselves too good to attend upon mankind for the preserving them from their spiritual enemies, and advancing this their great work of eternity. But, which is more than all this, God sends his own Son to live and to die for us. And the gospel of his everlasting salvation he hath taken care shall be daily sounding in our ears. We are told of our faults, and we are directed into the right way, and we are called upon continually to pursue it. The holy Spirit of God does daily solicit and importune our souls, as well by his holy word and the outward administrations of the church, as by his inward motions, to remember what we were born to ; and what God expects from us, and at least to yield up our hearts and lives to his divine conduct, and to render ourselves happy, by an entire closing with God Almighty's most gracious proposals : and, lastly, to say no more, the providence of God doth continually watch over us, and takes occasion, by the actions and events and contingencies that happen to us almost every

day of our lives, to put us in mind of our great concerns; to check us in our foolish career of vice and sin; to wean our affections from their unreasonable fondnesses to this world, and the vanities of it; and to bring us to a true sense of what we came hither for. All this God hath done, and doth daily for us. How now do we improve these blessed opportunities? What returns do we make to God for such unspeakable mercies? Why, in truth, it is a very sad and melancholy thing to give an answer to this question. Several there are among us, God be praised, that do make a right use of these blessings, and do seriously and carefully pursue an holy life, in order to their eternal happiness hereafter. And blessed of God be all such, and certainly for ever blessed shall they be of the Lord. But it must be confessed, that these are but few in comparison of the bulk of mankind. The generality of men, I doubt, are of another mind, and take other measures.

Give me leave to speak freely about this matter. Some there are among us, who laugh and scoff at all those things we are talking of; and look upon all this business of another world as a made story, for the frightening silly and timorous people: very wise and grave and learned men are they in the mean time. But I defy any of them to be able to arrive at this depth of thinking or talking, till by a course of vice and sensuality they have quite defaced the natural principles of their minds, and have scarce a spark of man remaining in them. Others there are, who make it their business to keep their heads continually hot with drink and company, that their consciences may not be made uneasy, nor their

minds disturbed with such troublesome reflections, as they certainly would be if they were but suffered to cool, and had the leisure calmly to reflect on these things. Others, partly through custom, and partly through their worldly inclinations, have so fettered and entangled themselves with a crowd of business and secular affairs, that that is always running in their heads, nor have they time to attend to any other matters. And others among us are altogether immersed in brutish and sensual lusts, and have no more sense of any thing that is not flesh and blood, than goats or satyrs. Lastly, others are rather silly and unthinking, than grossly wicked; they do believe these things, and often with reflection and concernedness enough call them to mind. But, they do not know how, they are fatally overborne with something or other from seriously and industriously pursuing the eternal welfare of their souls, though they are apprehensive enough how much it doth concern them. Their comfort is, they mean well, and their lives are not very bad; and they hope, some time or other, they shall have the grace to apply themselves closely to the business of a religious and serious and devout life; though at the present they cannot but own they lead a very careless one, having no sense of God or religion upon their minds as to their common conversation.

This last sort of people now, as they are (we thank God) the most in number, so are they the most hopeful of any of those I have now named; and therefore to these chiefly do I at this time apply my discourse.

You believe there is a God and a Devil; you believe that there is a heaven for pious and virtuous

persons to be rewarded in, and a hell in which all vicious and wicked men shall be everlastingly punished. And you are sensible likewise, that, according to the preparations you make in this life, so shall you have your portion in the one or in the other : nay, so far are you sensible of this, that you seriously think, some time or other, of calling yourselves to account for your life past, and reforming whatever is amiss in you, and making it your business to live more strictly and virtuously and religiously than ever you have yet done. Why all this is very well : but why, in God's name, do you defer it? why do not you go about it presently? Can you consider, that upon your behaviour in this life depends your whole eternity; and can you after this think it reasonable to neglect a day longer the securing that infinite concernment? What is it you do expect? Do you hope for clearer revelations of God's will in this matter? or more powerful assistances from his Spirit? alas! it is in vain. God hath made his last discoveries by Jesus Christ; nor are you ever to think of other motives, or other assistances, than what are made to you in the gospel, and which you have had already some experience of. And those too may fail you, if you do still continue to neglect or abuse them when God offers them to you. Do not deceive yourselves, God hath done all that is necessary; nay, all that is fit and convenient for his part to do towards your salvation. And if you will still harden your hearts, and stand out against his gracious tenders of mercy, your ruin will lie wholly at your own doors.

But perhaps you may think you shall be fitter for that serious work some time hence, when you have

despatched some other affairs that your hearts and hands are now full of. But this I have already shewn you is a vain imagination, it being certain, as I said, that every day of your life that you defer this business, it will still grow more difficult, and you will be less able to undertake it. But, after all, you do not consider that all this while you are demurring and putting off this work, I say, you do not consider what little command you have of your own life. You are now in health, and you think that by the course of nature you may live many years. But what if you should not? What if you should die a year hence, or a month hence? (as it is odds but that several that now hear me will be gone to their long home before another annual revolution be come about.) Nay, what if, while you are saying to yourselves, with the rich man in the Gospel, *Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*, you should hear a voice, saying, *O fool, this night shall thy soul be taken from thee?* Luke xii. 19, 20. O in what a miserable condition would you then be! It is in vain then to begin your work, for that is the time it should be concluded. It is in vain to beg for longer time, for the decree of heaven is passed upon you: you must go, though you be never so unwilling. If indeed you had any art, any skill, any power to prevail with death, or to oblige those, in whose hands your life is, to spare you, and give you longer time, you would say something. But this you cannot do, nay, you know you cannot do it. You come hither upon the same terms and conditions that all other people do. And you know that every man's life is at the mercy of a thousand accidents every day.

O, Lord, then what intolerable nonsense is it to put off the greatest business we have to do in the world, that business, which if it be not taken care of we are undone for evermore, in hopes of the continuance of a life, which we are not certain, no, nor is it possible we should have any certainty, that it will continue for a year; no, nor for a month; no, nor for a day. God Almighty give us grace so to consider these things, that we may all of us immediately *think of our ways, and turn our feet unto his testimonies, that we may make haste, and without further delay enter upon the keeping his commandments.*

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE QUEEN ANNE, 1709-10.

EPHES. iv. 1.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.

THAT is to say, You are, by the great mercy of God, called to be Christians. I beseech you, take care that your conversation be such as becomes that calling. God hath brought you out of the darkness of heathenism into the light of the gospel: it is fit therefore you should walk as children of the light. You have taken upon yourselves the profession of a holy and pure religion, which makes over to its followers inestimable privileges and benefits. This is your calling, your vocation: O let your lives bear some suitableness thereto! let the frame of your minds and the tenor of your actions hold some proportion with the dignity and mighty advantages of this high calling in Christ Jesus!

This is that which the apostle begs of the Ephesians here, and of all other Christians. And no man living can say that he asks any thing but what is infinitely reasonable. It is the fundamental law of universal nature, that every thing should act according to its kind; and it is the fundamental law of the reasonable nature in particular, that we should observe the respects and relations that things have to things, and the congruities and incongruities that

arise from hence, and direct all our actions accordingly. And whosoever in any case acts contradictorily to the person he sustains, or unsuitably to the profession he makes, doth act absurdly and ridiculously ; for he destroys the propriety, and confounds the relations of things. In short, for a man to be a Christian in vocation, to own Christ for his Lord, and the gospel for his rule ; and yet to live like a heathen, or an atheist, or a worldling, or an epicure, is such a piece of unreasonableness as no apology can be made for.

But what is it that the apostle would have us do ? What sort of conversation is it that he requires of us, when he bids us to *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called* ? I answer, You yourselves, and every man in the world, that understands what it is to be a Christian, is a competent judge of that. Do but inquire of yourselves what the nature of your vocation is, what you profess in it, and what benefits you expect from it, and you will need no instructor as to the sort of life and conversation that is worthy of it ; nor indeed will you need any further motives or arguments to oblige you to put it in practice. To assist you therefore in making these inquiries shall be my work at this time : and here my method shall be, first, to consider our vocation in general, and to shew what the obligations of that are :

2dly, To take notice of some particulars in our vocation, which will still add a further force to the general consideration.

I. I begin with our vocation in general. And there the query that I would propose to you to put to yourselves, is this : What sort of life doth so clear,

so full, so excellent a discovery of God's will for the salvation of mankind, as we have by Jesus Christ, in comparison of what the world had before; what sort of life, I say, doth it require of all those who have the knowledge of it? What kind of life should that man lead, who is called from darkness to light; from ignorance of God, and of the way of recommending ourselves to him, to a plain revelation of his will; from the bondage of death, to a certain hope of a glorious immortality; from a profane and impious worship, to a holy, pure, and reasonable service? Will not nature teach such a one, that, in proportion to those advantages he hath above others, he ought also to be more exact and regular in his life, more careful to approve himself to God, more studious of his will, and more zealous and industrious in his service, than other men who have not those means or those privileges? Yet this, my brethren, is our vocation, and therefore judge ye how unworthy we are of it, if it do not produce those effects in us. Nay, judge ye whether this our vocation will not turn to our unspeakable misery and punishment, if it be not attended with those fruits: *If I had not*, says our Saviour, *come and spoken to them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin*, John xv. 22. There was something to be said for men who lived in the darkness of Gentilism, who had no other guide but the mere light of nature, and that too horribly darkened and obscured through that universal degeneracy and corruption of manners that obtained all the world over: *The times of this ignorance God might be supposed to wink at*, Acts xvii. 30; or if he would punish those men for their sins, yet it was to be hoped that he

would do it lightly; and *because they knew not their Master's will*, and therefore *did it not*, they *should be beaten only with few stripes*, as our Lord expresses it, Luke xii. 48. Nay, there was something also to be said in excuse for those who lived a worldly, sensual, vicious life, under the Jewish dispensation, where, though they were in covenant with God, and had his laws and his promises, yet both those laws and promises being in the letter and outward appearance of an earthly, temporal nature, and in a manner relating only to the things of this life; it might be presumed a hard matter for them to raise up their minds above this world, they seeming to want both light and encouragement to put them upon a vigorous pursuit of holiness here, or happiness hereafter. Upon this consideration, I say, there was something to be said in apology for the Jews, though they lived not so purely and so virtuously as they ought to do. But for us who are under the Christian dispensation, who have been instructed in the whole will of God, and that by no less a master than his own Son; who have the strongest demonstrations in the world given us of another life after this, and the most explicit promises that we shall be partakers of it if we be obedient to God's laws, and have likewise the plainest and fullest rules to direct us in that obedience; so that none of us, how ignorant or how shallow soever we be in other respects, yet, if we be honest, can possibly miss of our way to heaven: and, lastly, who have all this made out to us with so much clearness of evidence, as will leave no place for doubting in any reasonable, indifferent mind: I say, what can be said for us, if, after having these great opportunities put into our hands of

entering into God's everlasting rest, any of us fall short through disobedience or unbelief, Heb. iii.

O happy we Christians above all men in the world, if having these clear discoveries of God's will, and these inestimable advantages that flow therefrom, we do embrace and entertain them, and improve and make that use of them we ought to do, by leading a holy, pure, and heavenly life ! But certainly we are the most inexcusable, wretched people under heaven, if we do not : much *better had it been for us*, as St. Peter speaks, *never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we have known it, to depart from the holy commandment delivered to us*, 2 Ep. ii. 21.

O, my brethren, to consider in how much darkness all the rest of the world lies, and what a glorious light shines forth to us Christians ; to consider how little hopes, or how little means they have of everlasting salvation, and how richly, how abundantly God hath furnished us with both ; so that nothing is wanting to us, in order to our being everlastingly happy, but only our own choice and concurrence ; how ought this consideration to affect us ! What infinite thanks do we owe to our gracious God for these unspeakable mercies ! And how can we express these thanks otherwise than by the returns of a most hearty love, and devoting ourselves entirely to his service all the days of our life !

It is true, there are very few, if there be any, nations in the world so barbarous, as not to be of some religion or other. They do believe a God, and his providence and government of the world : nay, the generality of pagan countries at this day do expect another life after this, wherein good men shall be

rewarded, and wicked men punished. But then these general fundamental truths are so buried in an heap of errors, are so defaced, and the force of them so much weakened through a multitude of false and mischievous principles that are mingled with them, that really the condition of those countries is very deplorable. What shameful, false notions have they of God and his perfections! What horrible idolatry and superstition is to be seen in all their worship! How slenderly grounded is their belief of another life, and what odd kind of fancies have they about it! What a world of foppery and nonsense is there in all their divinity! How much are they in the dark touching the will of God and the way of recommending themselves to his favour! and how various and fanciful, nay, how ridiculous, and often impious, are the methods they have pitched on for this purpose! Not to speak of the horrible slavery they are in to the Devil, who exercises a most cruel tyranny over them in abundance of instances.

But, blessed be the God of heaven, we Christians have none of these difficulties, none of these inconveniences to struggle with. We have a holy and a pure religion taught us by God himself; a religion, that in all the parts of it is worthy of God, and fitted to all the necessities of man. We have a religion that teaches us to serve God in a way suitable to his nature and to our own, that imposeth nothing upon us but what is good and excellent in itself, and tending to the perfection of our natures, and to the peace and happiness both of private persons and public societies. We have a religion that leaves us not to uncertain guesses and conjectures about a future salvation, but has given us God's express

word and promise for it, sealed by the blood of his own Son, and confirmed by his resurrection from the dead, and taking possession of the kingdom of heaven in our behalf. We have a religion that leaves us not to grope in the dark how to get to that glorious place where our Saviour is, but has described to us all the way that leads to it so plainly, and withal given us such notices of all the by-paths that may mislead us, that, if we be not extremely wanting to ourselves, we cannot fail of arriving thither. We have a religion that recommends itself to our reason and understanding, in which there is nothing trifling, nothing absurd, and which the more any man acquaints himself with, the more satisfaction he will have concerning it. Lastly, we have a religion for which there is all the proof, all the evidence, that either heaven or earth can give for a thing of this nature. It is a religion predicted by the prophets; owned several times by God's own voice from heaven; confessed by the devils; established by an innumerable multitude of signs and wonders and miracles for a hundred years together; attested by the glorious resurrection of our Saviour from the grave, and his visible ascension into heaven; confirmed by the lives and wonderful actions of a continued succession of wise and good and divine men who have professed it; manifested by the overthrow of the Devil's kingdom in all places where it got footing; and asserted by the sufferings of ten thousand glorious martyrs and confessors, who have from age to age refused no torments, no cruelties of death, to shew how firmly they believed it.

This now being the case of the Christian religion; and the profession of this religion being the happy

and glorious *vocation to which we are called* by our Lord Jesus, O what obligations do there lie upon us, above all the rest of mankind, to be serious in the service of God, to be pure and unblamable in our lives, and to abound in all *the fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus, to the praise and glory of his name*, Phil. i. 11. and so to shew forth the natural, genuine fruits of so holy, so excellent a religion! O what *manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!* 2 Pet. iii. 11. Can there be any among us who *names the name of Christ, and not depart from all iniquity?* 2 Tim. ii. 19. Is it possible, that where so glorious a light shines forth, there should be any such men as atheists, Sadducees, or unbelievers? any such thing as profaneness, adultery, whoredom, drunkenness, envy, malice, covetousness, or the like? Why these are the proper fruits of the heathen state, out of which Christ hath delivered us: and one would think that none of them should be found among Christians. These are the works of darkness, and fit only for such people where the light of the gospel never appeared, and who are the vassals of Satan, and *led captive by him at his will* and pleasure, 2 Tim. ii. 26. but no way becoming the children of light, who make profession to believe in our Lord Jesus. But why do I talk of Christians? The heathens themselves (as wretched as their circumstances were) were many of them ashamed of such practices, and therefore they shall be our judges. Many of them, notwithstanding the great darkness and ignorance they lay under, notwithstanding the multitude of ill examples they had before them, yet have so preserved the dignity of human nature, as

to keep themselves pure from those crimes and immoralities which I have now been speaking of: nay, many of them, without any other power than those of nature, have, through the blessing of God upon their endeavours, not only learned to live free from all taint of open vice, but have been indeed patterns of virtue; have been exemplary for justice and temperance, for fortitude and patience, for fidelity and truth, for munificence and liberality, for moderation and contempt of the world, for a public spirit and a zealous love for their country. Several such instances are to be met with, not only among the ancient Greeks and Romans, but among the modern Indians and Japanese, and other barbarous nations. O how much more in this are they to be commended and applauded, than even some of us who pass among the better sort of Christians! (as Christianity nowadays goes.) But what an eternal shame and reproach is this to the generality of us, who in good earnest are not to be named with many of the pagans for true virtue and religion! Is this *to walk worthy of the calling wherewith we are called*? Is this *to adorn the doctrine of God in all things*? Titus ii. 10. They, with all their ignorance, and all their errors in matters of religion, lived honestly, had a sense of God and virtue. A great many of us, with all our light, all our encouragements, all our assistances, live like brutes, like men without God; slaves to a thousand follies, to a thousand lusts and passions; nay, in truth, I am afraid that even a great many serious men among us cannot think of several of the heathens, such men as Socrates and Aristides, such men as Cato and Tully and Seneca, and a great many more such that might be named,

without blushing for shame that we come so very far short of them, having a thousand times more knowledge in the things of God, and more means and encouragements and advantages for the improving ourselves in all sorts of virtue than they had. But let us not deceive ourselves, *God is no respecter of persons*, Acts x. 34. I heartily wish that those poor heathens, of whom we generally have so mean an opinion, may not one day rise in judgment against us Christians, and condemn us; (not that I wish them ill, but I wish we were better;) and that it do not come to pass what our Saviour once told the Jews, that *many shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; when many of us, who are the children of the kingdom, shall be cast out into outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*, Matt. viii. 11, 12.

But it is time to leave this head, and to proceed. I have hitherto considered our vocation in general, as it is the taking upon ourselves the profession of the Christian religion. And by this general account I have given you of it, you may easily perceive what great obligations are laid upon us Christians to lead holy, pure, and virtuous lives above all the men in the world; and how unworthy we are of our vocation, and how contradictorily we act to it, if we do not. But you will still be more convinced of this, if you will enter into a consideration of the particular things either done for you or promised by you, in the taking this calling upon yourselves.

These therefore I shall now briefly touch upon, in

order to the further shewing what kind of *walking is worthy of our vocation*, and what obligations we have upon us so to walk. And this is the second part of my Discourse.

II. Now the considerations I would propose are these following, which I shall put, as I did the former, in the nature of queries: and I beg of you that you will answer them to your own consciences.

1. I beseech you consider what kind of life should that man lead, who, through the infinite kindness of the Son of God, is rescued from the jaws of hell and death; is redeemed from the wrath of God, and the insupportable vengeance of eternal fire, which his sins did justly call for; and this at no less a price than that Son of God laying down his life, and shedding his most precious blood, that he might thereby make a propitiation for us. This now is the case of every Christian. And doth it become such a one, because he hath been pardoned so many and so high provocations; I say, doth it become him to go on in his sins? Doth it become him to take advantage from the inexpressible mercies he hath found, to multiply his affronts against heaven, that so, *because grace hath abounded, sin may abound much more?* Rom. v. and vi. O, unnatural, wicked, blasphemous inference! Sure every man, who is sensible what it cost the Son of God to redeem sinners might have other thoughts; and must rather argue thus, that since our dear Lord Jesus hath, at so vast a price, obtained the pardon of our sins, and, by his calling us to his service, hath given us a title to that pardon, we should, above all things in the world, have a care of new scores, have a care of again offending our God, and provoking his displeasure against us.

It is an unnatural thing to reason otherwise; and whoever has any sense of ingenuity cannot but look upon this astonishing kindness of our Lord, in ransoming us with his blood, as the greatest obligation that could possibly be laid upon us to renounce, to abandon, to hate with a perfect hatred, all sin and wickedness in all the kinds and even in all the degrees of it.

2. Again, pray ask yourselves what kind of conversation becomes that man who hath solemnly dedicated himself to God; who hath publicly, and in the face of the world, professed to renounce the Devil and all his works, the vanities of the world, and the lusts of the flesh, and devoted himself, both body and soul, as a living, holy sacrifice for ever to his Creator and Redeemer. And yet this is the case of all of us who are made partakers of the Christian vocation. This engagement we have all taken upon ourselves at our first entering into Christ's religion, and most of us, to be sure, if not all of us, have several times renewed it. So that being thus solemnly consecrated to God and Christ, we are none of us at our own disposal, but have entirely given up ourselves to God to be disposed of by him. O let us think of this, and then judge what kind of conversation will be worthy of our calling; whether, being in these circumstances, it will be possible for us, without the most horrid perjury and sacrilege, to allow ourselves in any known, open course of wilful sin; nay, whether being thus devoted to God, we are not very false to our engagements, if we do not make his service, and the promoting his interests, the great business and design of our lives.

3. Be pleased to ask yourselves further, what

kind of life should that man lead who is called into the nearest relation to God Almighty; who, from a child of wrath and slave of Satan, is made the *son of God*, the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, and a *joint heir with him of the inheritance of God*, Rom. viii. 17. Why certainly, upon the very first naming of this, it should come into every body's thoughts, that a person who is thus highly dignified ought to have a great and a noble and a generous soul, suitable to that quality to which he is advanced, and becoming that illustrious quality into which he is adopted. It should come into every body's thoughts, that such a person should think himself concerned above all things to behave himself in all the circumstances of his life bravely and worthily, and should take a world of care that he did not by any base, mean carriage of his, put a disparagement upon that alliance that he is honoured with. And yet this is the calling to which we Christians are called: these are the privileges that, by undertaking Christ's religion, we are promoted to. We are the *children of the Most High*, Luke vi. 35. and the Son of God *is not ashamed to call us brethren*, Heb. ii. 11. We are made *kings and priests unto God* our Father, Rev. v. 10. We are *his friends, his favourites, his chosen ones*, John xv. 14, 15; in a word, *the portion, the possession, the treasure of God* in this world, Ephes. i. 14. 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9. All these titles are bestowed upon Christians by the inspired writers. O, therefore, let us consider these privileges of our calling, and then judge what kind of conversation is worthy of it.

4. Pray ask yourselves likewise, what sort of life he is to lead who owns the gospel of Christ for the

rule of his actions, and by his very calling hath engaged himself to the practice of every thing which is there enjoined. Whoever hath read the gospel knows what kind of precepts it is made up of, and must be convinced that no rules of living, that were ever given to the world before, can pretend to come near it for perfectness and exactness.

There is indeed no great stress laid there upon any kind of ceremonies or outward observances: God never set any value upon these in any religion. But for the things that are intrinsically good; for the things that do really perfect and adorn human nature; for the things that do accomplish the mind and spirit of a man: the Christian institution, as it is set forth in the gospel, is the highest, the noblest, the exactest, and withal the severest that ever was set on foot in the world. There all sorts of purity and holiness, every kind and every degree of virtue are recommended, and every thing that hath but the appearance of vice and sin is discouraged. There we are called upon to be *holy, as God is holy*, 1 Pet. i. 15, 16; *to be merciful, as he is merciful*, Luke vi. 36. There even our disorderly desires and appetites, though they do not break forth into outward actions, are reprov'd and discountenanced. And it is made a sin not only to commit adultery, to kill, or steal, or defraud our neighbours of their right, to do injuries, or the like; but the very workings of our minds towards these things (if our consent be given to them) are declared culpable. As we must not commit adultery, so we must *not look upon a woman to lust after her*. As we must not defraud our neighbour, so neither must we covet what belongs to him. As we must not kill, so neither must

we be angry without a cause. As we must not do an injury, so neither must we revenge one that is done to us. As we must not be ungrateful to our friends, so neither must we hate our enemies, but do them all the good we can : and thus as to all the other instances of our duty.

O holy religion ! O just and excellent laws ! worthy to come from God, and worthy of our Lord Jesus Christ to promulgate, and most of all worthy of us to be observed. And therefore let every one, who names the gospel of Christ, *walk worthy of this his vocation*, by seriously endeavouring to bring all his thoughts and words and deeds, throughout the whole course of his life, to a conformity with the laws there delivered.

5. And, in the next place, pray ask yourselves how that man ought to live who professes in his life to copy out the example of our Lord Jesus. Our calling, our vocation, is to be the disciples of Christ ; and the very notion of being a disciple, is to frame our way of living according to the pattern that he whom we call our Master hath set before us. And therefore, as the apostle hath told us, if we pretend to be Christ's disciples, we *ought to walk even as he walked*, 1 John ii. 6.

But now, if we take him for our pattern, then we may easily know what kind of conversation will be worthy of our calling. If we call ourselves the disciples of Christ, then we must be *humble and meek and lowly in heart*, for he was so in the greatest degree, Matt. xi. 29. We must not be arrogant or assuming, but descend to the meanest offices of civility and charity ; for the Son of man, our Lord and Master, *came not to be ministered unto, but to minister*,

Matt. xx. 28. We must think nothing below us, if we can thereby shew courtesy to our brethren; for the Author of our religion and our happiness did descend even to the washing the very feet of the disciples, John xiii. We must be easy and gentle to all about us: not easily provoked; and, when we are provoked, ready to forgive the injuries that are done us: for this was the way of our Master; he was never known to be put out of his temper by any perverseness, any impertinence, any affront or indignity that was offered him. He was gentle to all men, patient under the greatest sufferings, and so regardless of injuries, that he not only forgave those who had the malice to take away his life, but he heartily prayed for them, Luke xxiii. 34. He never sought himself, or his own interests, in any thing he did, but only the glory of God. And can you then be called his followers who seek nothing but yourselves in all your designs and actions? who have no regard to God's glory, but only to what serves your turn best in the present circumstances? He was full of tenderness and compassion to all who needed his help; nay, *he went about doing good*, Acts x. 38. it was the very business of his life. And can you think it becomes you his disciples to be hardhearted and pitiless and unmerciful, to be surly, or selfish, or covetous, to live uselessly and unprofitably in your generations, when God has given you sundry talents, sundry means and opportunities, whereby you may do a great deal of good, and be very useful to others in the place and station wherein God hath put you? He, though he was as full of employment as any man, yet he constantly took his times of retirement from the world, and gave up

himself to the spiritual exercises of prayer and meditation, and communion with God : nay, he sometimes spent whole nights in those exercises, Luke vi. 12. And can you his disciples pretend so much business that you have no leisure for your devotions ? Or can you live without any sense or feeling that you have need of communion with God ? and satisfy yourselves if now and then you put up a few, cold, formal, heartless prayers to him ? Our Lord was very contented and thankful, and heartily resigned to God, though he was very poor, and had not so much as an house to put his head in, Matt. viii. 20. Can it then become any of you who are his followers to be uneasy under your present circumstances, or to repine at God's dispensations to you ? Is it decent that you should be querulous or discontented at your condition, when your Lord and Master, who had as little a share of worldly goods as any of you, was very thankful to God for whatever happened to him. O that all of us would make it a little more our business to look into our Lord's life, and observe how he behaved himself in all emergencies ! what kind of life he led, and what spirit and temper he was of ! We should then be more and more convinced how purely, how holily we ought to live, if we would walk worthily of our vocation.

6. Pray ask yourselves further, what sort of life he ought to lead, who by his admission to this high calling has such extraordinary assistance from the Holy Spirit made over to him, over and above the powers that nature hath furnished him with. Every one, who is a member of Christ, has from God a promise of the Holy Ghost to assist him in the carry-

ing on the work of his vocation. Nay more, our Saviour has given us his holy Spirit, not only to stand by us and support us, but also to be in us, as a principle of life, to dwell within us, to take our souls and bodies for his habitation. So that every true Christian may, in the most proper sense, be said to be *a temple of God*, a tabernacle where the Holy Spirit is pleased to inhabit, 1 Cor. iii. 16.

Think now what is the natural consequence we ought to draw from hence: think what infinite obligations are hereby laid upon us to keep ourselves holy and undefiled, both as to soul and body: think how undecently we treat our sacred guest whenever we give consent to any wicked, impure thing. Lastly, think what glorious things are expected from us, what excellent attainments we ought to make in every virtue and grace, who have a divine power so near us, nay within us, to strengthen us in all difficulties, to support us under all trials and temptations, and to carry us on, if we be not wanting to ourselves, to the most noble undertakings and achievements.

7. Once more, and I have done. Pray ask yourselves what kind of life should he lead who is called out of this world, and has his name enrolled among the citizens of the other world; who, by his profession, declares himself to be *a stranger and a pilgrim here, and to look for an abiding and continuing city, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*, Heb. xiii. Doth it become such a man to live as God knows too many of us do? to be so wholly intent upon the business and designs of this earth, as if we were always to live upon it? to make it the work of our lives to be contriving and projecting for

our secular conveniences or delights, and but now and then, at set seasons, to lift up our minds to God, and to attend the concernments of our everlasting state? to be alarmed at every thing; to be ruffled and discomposed at every thing that threatens the disturbance of our pleasures, or the diminution of our worldly substance? I say, can this be thought a conversation that becomes a man who bears the character I have now given? Certainly, no; the furthest from it of all things. He that hath laid up his treasures in heaven should not be much concerned about the treasures of this earth. It becomes such a man to sit loose from the world, and all the vanities of it. He should just use it as a man in a journey doth an inn, for his present accommodation and refreshment, but not to set up his dwelling there. Heaven should be the place to which all his thoughts and studies should tend; thither should all his designs and pursuits be directed. And whatever became of him here, however it should please God to exercise him in this life, whether by poverty or riches, health or sickness, a splendid fortune or low and mean circumstances, all should be in a manner indifferent to him, if he got but to heaven at last.

This now, brethren, is our case: here we are in the world at present, and we are allowed by our gracious God to serve ourselves of it, as to the use of all the things that tend to make our abode here tolerably easy and comfortable: but heaven is our home; that is the country we are in quest of, and for the sake of which we took upon us the profession of Christ's disciples; that is *the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus*, Phil. iii. 14. Would we therefore walk suitably to our vocation? Let us

mind that. Let us live like men of another world, (as we profess to be.) Let God and heaven, and the things above, have our hearts, our desires, our affections, while this world hath our bodies. By this means we shall not only secure to ourselves this everlasting, never-fading inheritance, which is the end of our faith, and the hope of our calling; but we shall also make the best provision possible for a happy life even in this world; for Christ has solemnly promised us, that if we *first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all the other things we need shall be added unto us.*

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE QUEEN ANNE, 1710.

ACTS xvii. 31.

—he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained.

THESE words are a part of that sermon which St. Paul preached to the men of Athens. The design of them, as you may easily perceive, was to convince the Athenians of the necessity of leaving their idolatry and their vicious conversation, and to persuade them to a hearty return to God, by a serious repentance and faith in the gospel; and that from this consideration, that *God had appointed a time in which he would call all men to account for their actions past*, reward the good with everlasting happiness, and punish the wicked and unbelievers with endless torments.

And certainly there is no other argument in the world so effectual for the persuading men to quit their ungodly courses, and to betake themselves to a serious, devout, religious life, as this of the general judgment, which shall come upon all men at the end of the world. The other arguments for repentance, drawn from the goodness of God, and the infinite kindness of our Lord Jesus, in laying down his life for us, and the folly and unreasonableness of all sin in itself, and the ill consequences that it brings upon

us in the world ; I say, these, and such like, though they are very strong in themselves, yet, God knows, through the horrible corruption of human nature, they have often no effect upon us : such slaves we are to our lusts, that for the love of them we can make a shift to break through all these considerations. But now, when a future judgment and the terrors of damnation are laid before us, and pressed upon us, these do come so close to our dearly beloved principle of self-preservation, and so strongly work upon our passions of fear and hope, which do most influence us, that, if they be seriously believed and considered, it is impossible for human nature to resist them ; *Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men*, 2 Cor. v. 11. So saith St. Paul in another place, intimating, that if these do not persuade men, nothing else can. These are the last remedies to be applied to men's minds ; and if they be unsuccessful, their case is desperate.

The point therefore that I now mean to speak to is the manner and circumstances of Christ's coming to judge the world, and the proceedings of that judgment, and the consequences that will follow upon those proceedings.

Now several very considerable things our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles have discovered to us in this matter, which are to be found interspersed in the speeches of our Lord recorded in the Gospels, and in the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter, and the Revelations of St. John. These passages, therefore, it shall now be my business to collect into one view, and to reduce them under their distinct heads, and to make such reflections upon them as every particular leads me to.

1. The first thing I take notice of, as to the manner and circumstances of the day of judgment, which the scriptures give us an account of, is this, that it shall come upon the world suddenly and unexpectedly. Thus St. Peter; *The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night*, 2 Pet. iii. 10. viz. without any previous notice. It will surprise the world, when they think not of it, when they least expect it. And our Lord, speaking of that day, acquaints us, that *as a snare it shall come upon all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth*, Luke xxi. 35. And in another place he tells us, that *as it was in the days of Noah, so should it be also in the day of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat and drink, they bought and sold, they planted and builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone out of heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed*, Luke xvii. 26—30.

Though in some of these expressions our Saviour may seem to have respect to his unexpected coming to destroy Jerusalem, yet the words are not to be confined to that, as appears from the parallel passage in St. Matthew; but do mainly and principally relate to his coming to the general judgment: of which his judgment upon Jerusalem was both a forerunner and also a solemn figure and representation. And that is the reason why our Saviour doth so often mix his discourses of both these together.

Now this sudden and unexpected approach of the day of judgment, how ought it to affect our hearts! how ought it to oblige us not to be taken unprovided at that day! how will it astonish and confound us, if the *Bridegroom should come*, and we, like the *foolish virgins, are fast asleep without oil in our lamps!* Matt. xxv. 3—5.

O what amazement, what horror will seize us, when, in the midst of our diversions and pleasures, or in the full tide of our secular business, when our heads are full of other designs, when we are promising to ourselves many fair years of happiness, and thinking that all will go well with us, all of a sudden to see the world falling in pieces about us, and ready to be buried in its own ruins, and to hear the dreadful trumpet summoning us to appear before our Judge to give an account of all our actions! O it was a dreadful word that was spoken to the rich man in the Gospel, who, pleasing himself with the happiness of his present condition, said to himself, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But, saith God to him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee*, Luke xii. 19, 20. Surely great was the horror, and bitter was the agony that the man was in when he heard this. But, alas! thus shall it happen to the greatest part of the world at that day. Let us all therefore follow that advice that our Saviour gives us upon this very occasion; let us *take heed to ourselves, lest at any time our hearts be overcharged with surfeittings, and drunkenness, and the inordinate cares of this life, and so that day come upon us unawares*, Luke xxi. 34. Let us *watch and pray always, that we*

may be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man, ver. 36.

2. The second particular which the scripture acquaints us with concerning the general judgment, is this; that the earth shall then be set on fire, and that in the most terrible manner imaginable. Whether this general conflagration will happen upon Christ's coming to judgment, or rather will be the last transaction of the judgment, the scripture doth not declare. But that there shall be such a conflagration, and that this fire shall be for the everlasting punishment both of the Devil and wicked men, who will all be tumbled down into these lower regions, which will then be a perfect *lake* or *sea of fire*, (as the scripture expresseth it, Rev. xix. 20.) is beyond all doubt. To this purpose let us observe what the apostle says, *The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire to take vengeance of them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Thess. i. 7.*

But more expressly this conflagration of the world is taught us in the Second Epistle of St. Peter, chap. iii. ver. 6, 7. where the apostle tells us, that *as the world which was of old perished by an universal deluge of water, so the heavens and the earth, which are now, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.* From whence it is plain, that at the day of judgment this world shall be set on fire, and that fire shall be for the punishment of ungodly men. Furthermore, in the verses following, he adds to the same purpose, *The day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the*

night ; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up, ver. 10.

If any one be at a loss to conceive how the heavens should be set on fire as well as the earth, as St. Peter three times in this chapter affirms they shall be, the difficulty will be removed by considering that the heavens here spoken of are not those heavens in which the stars are, (in which signification we commonly use that word,) but the sublunary heavens, viz. those lower regions of the air, wherein are the clouds and vapours and other meteors, which are here called the elements, and in which sense the heavens are frequently taken in holy scripture. Now these heavens, together with all that is in them, shall at that day pass away with a crackling noise of fire, and the earth, and all the things in it, shall be put in flames. David tells us, Ps. xi. 6. that *upon the wicked God shall rain fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest : this shall be the portion of their cup.* And our Saviour intimates the same, when he tells us, as *in the day when Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all ; so shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed, Luke xvii. 29, 30.*

And now who can express the horror and confusion that shall be at that day? Who can fancy so sad and dismal a face of things, as shall then be all the world over? Could we imagine ourselves to be present when the whole frame of nature is upon the point of dissolution, and the whole world in flames about our ears, with what terror and amazement

should we be filled? How would our hearts fail us, *and our joints be loosed, and our knees smite against each other*, Dan. v. 6. unless we were sure we were in the number of those who should be wafted up to meet the Bridegroom with comfort! O what will then become of all impenitent sinners! What will become of all worldly, sensual, ambitious, voluptuous men, who set up their rest in this world, and mind nothing but their ease, and the gratification of their appetites, or the pursuit of their secular interests! When they shall see all that they loved, all that they admired, all that they delighted in, gone, irrecoverably gone in a moment! Lastly, what will become of all those bold, profane persons, who entertained all discourses of a future judgment only with scoffs and derision! O, how will they find themselves abused, and see, to their great amazement, what they would never before believe, that *there is a reward for the righteous, that there is indeed a God that judgeth the earth*, Ps. lviii. 11.

But I pass on to the third particular that the scripture acquaints us with, as to this day of judgment, and that is this :

3. That when Christ shall come to judge the world, there shall then be a visible throne or tribunal erected in the air, whereon he shall in person sit as the Judge, attended with an infinite multitude of the heavenly host. This is told us over and over again in the New Testament. Thus our Saviour tells us, *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels of God with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory*, Matt. xxv. 31. And St. John, in his visions of the general judgment, tells us, (Rev. xx. 4.) that *he saw thrones, and they sat*

upon them, that is, the angels and saints did ; and judgment was given unto them. And besides these thrones, (ver. 11.) *he saw a great white throne*, viz. a throne of light exceedingly magnificent and glorious; and he saw *him that sat upon it*, that is, our Lord Jesus; and so terrible was his majesty, that, as he there tells us, *the heaven and earth did fly away before his face.*

Furthermore, this throne of Christ is expressly called his tribunal or judgment seat, as when the apostle tells us, that *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*, Rom. xiv. 10. 2 Cor. v. 10. Now that this throne, this judgment seat, shall be fixed in the air, and the general assize to be there held, which is another thing I mentioned under this particular, is clear from that passage of St. Paul, where he saith, *The Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, and then, both those that are raised from the dead, and those that are alive and remain, shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*, 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.

O now who can express, or who can conceive the exceeding glory of this majestic appearance of our Lord Jesus, when he shall descend from heaven with mighty shouts and acclamations, *with the trumpet of God*, with an innumerable company of glorious angels, and shall seat himself upon his magnificent throne, encircled with all those blissful sons of light! How will it surprise the best of men! But O how will it confound the wicked and ungodly! If the appearance of God upon mount Sinai, with the thunders and lightnings which accompanied it, was so extremely terrible even to Moses, the friend of God, that, as the text tells us, *he did exceedingly*

quake and tremble, Heb. xii. 21. Or if St. Paul, before his conversion, upon that little glimpse he had of that glorious light, wherein Christ shall appear at the last day, was so astonished, that he fell down from his horse, and lay as a dead man; O how shall they, who are the enemies of Christ, who have highly offended and provoked him, and are conscious to themselves of what they have deserved from him, how shall they be able to abide his presence at that day, when the gloriousness and majesty and terribleness of his appearance will infinitely exceed all that the tongue of man can express, or the heart of man conceive!

4. Another thing which the scriptures assure us of, concerning the general judgment, is this; that then there shall be a personal appearance of all mankind before this tribunal of Christ. St. Paul, in the texts before quoted, tells us, *We must all appear, we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*, Rom. xiv. 10. 2 Cor. v. 10. Our Saviour tells us, that *before him shall be gathered all nations*, Matt. xxv. 32. And St. John, in his visions of the judgment, tells us, (Rev. xx. 12.) that *he saw the dead, both small and great, stand before God. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and the grave delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man*, ver. 13. And St. Paul, 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17. that *the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air*. From these texts of

scripture put together, several remarkable things may be gathered, viz.

(1.) In the general, that all men and women that ever have been, or are, or shall be in the world, shall, at the general judgment, appear in person before the tribunal of Christ.

(2.) That, in order thereto, the dead, as well those in the sea as those in the earth, shall, by the effectual power of Christ, (going along with the trumpet, which shall then sound,) be raised up, and summoned to this general rendezvous.

(3.) From hence likewise it may be gathered, that all persons shall not die; but those that are living, when the judgment comes, shall be caught up alive *to meet the Lord Jesus in the air*, 1 Thess. iv. 17. This is to be understood only of virtuous, good men, such as are the true disciples of Christ, for to such only the context restraineth it. The same observation may also be deduced from that passage in the fifteenth of the Corinthians, *Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all die, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the trumpet shall sound*, 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

(4.) From which text we further gather, that those good souls that shall be then alive, and are to be mounted up into the air, shall have their bodies changed in a moment, i. e. melted from a gross, earthly consistency, to a pure, subtle, spiritual nature, so that they shall be of a contexture and temper suitable to those pure regions where they are going to inhabit: *for flesh and blood* (such as we now have) is far too gross and impure *to inherit the kingdom of God*, as the apostle there expresseth it, ver. 50. And these are those *spiritual, incorrupt-*

ible, immortal bodies, that he speaks of in that chapter, and in several other passages.

(5.) Lastly, from these texts we observe further, that this general appearance at the judgment seat of Christ shall not be all at once; but holy men, they who are *dead in Christ, shall rise first*, ver. 24, and, together with those good people *who are alive and remain, be carried by angels with joy to meet their Saviour*, 1 Thess. iv. 15, 17. And after they have received their sentence of justification and absolution, they shall sit with Christ, as his assistants, *in the judging of wicked men and the fallen angels*, 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3; and then afterwards shall the wicked be raised and brought to the tribunal.

I cannot stay to make any reflections on these observations, though they afford matter for many curious and pious ones: but I proceed to the next point.

5. That which follows upon this appearance before the tribunal, is the giving up our accounts to the Judge. This St. Peter tells us; *We shall give an account to him who is ready to judge the quick and the dead*, 1 Pet. iv. 5. And St. Paul; *We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and every one of us shall give an account of himself to God*, Rom. xiv. 10, 12. But of all other texts this particular is most lively set forth to us by our Saviour in the Gospel of St. Matthew, viz. in the parable of the master that *went into a far country, and called unto him his servants, and delivered unto them his goods*, Matt. xxv. 14, &c. giving unto one so many talents, and to another so many, to every man according to his station. And after a long time the lord comes home and reckons with them, and

according to their improvements or abuse of those talents doth he proportionably reward or punish every one of them: So shall it be at the day of judgment. The Lord of all the families of the earth will call every man to account of his management here upon earth. He will enter into a severe scrutiny how we have employed all those talents that he hath intrusted us with. Then shall all the powers and faculties that have been given us, all the favours and benefits we have enjoyed, all the means and opportunities that have been afforded us for the living virtuously and holily, and thereby bringing honour and glory to our Master, be brought into our view, and an account be demanded of them. He will account with us for our senses, how we have employed them, whether to the purposes they were given us for, the furnishing our understandings and the right governing of our bodies, or whether we have made them only instruments of sin and inlets to vanity. He will account with us for our reason and conscience, how we have employed them, whether we have done our best to improve them, and whether they have been faithful guides of our actions, or we have suffered them to be abused with folly and false principles, and to be led captive by our lusts and passions. He will call us to account for our memories, how we have employed them, whether we have been careful to treasure up in them such things as might be useful to our lives, or have only made them the repositories of things idle and impertinent and unprofitable. He will call us to account how we have spent our time in this world, whether we have employed it to good purposes, in an honest, laborious pursuit of a lawful calling, setting a due por-

tion thereof apart for the more immediate service of God, and spending the remainder innocently and wisely ; or we have squandered it away in idleness, in play, in revelling, in impertinent or vicious conversation, in the neglect of our main business. He will call us to account for the good creatures he hath from time to time bestowed upon us for our support and refreshment, how we have employed them ; whether we have used them thankfully and soberly, with temperance and moderation, or we have abused them to luxury and excess, to gluttony or drunkenness, making therewith *provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*, Rom. xiii. 14. He will call us to account for our learning and intellectual accomplishments, for the advantages of our education, for our health and strength, for our wealth and riches, for our greatness, power, and reputation, and all those special and eminent talents that he hath intrusted us with above others, how we have employed them, whether we have made them instruments of doing a great deal of good, and being eminently useful in our generation, or they have only ministered to pride and vanity and self-pleasing, if not to the worse purposes of vice and wickedness. Lastly, he will call us to account for all the opportunities of grace and means of salvation which we have enjoyed ; for all the good counsels and wise exhortations that have been given us ; for the revelation of his Son that hath been made known to us ; for the use of his word and sacraments ; for all the motions and suggestions of his holy Spirit within us, dissuading us from sin, and alluring and soliciting us to a course of virtue and holiness : for all these, I say, he will call us to account how we have employed them ;

whether we have improved them to the purposes they were given for, as we should have done; whether we have grown in grace, and brought forth fruit suitable to so many helps and advantages, or have been idle and *unprofitable servants*, Matt. xxv. 30. These, and a great many other things, which we now scarce think of, shall we be accountable for to the Judge at that day. And then shall all our actions, good or bad, the most secret as well as those that were public, be inquired into: then shall all the intents and thoughts and designs of our hearts be revealed and thoroughly scanned; for this is the *day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*, Rom. ii. 5. Then shall the wisdom and the justice of the divine Providence appear eminently to all the world, in *rewarding every man according to his works*, Matt. xvi. 27. In vain will it be then to expect favour, any otherwise than as we have laid the grounds for it by our repentance in this life; for we are then before an impartial tribunal. In vain will it be for us to think of shuffling and evading; for however we may by our artifices blind the eyes of men in this world, yet we have one to deal with then who can easily see through all our shifts and disguises. In vain will it be to endeavour to conceal any thing at that day, for *all things are naked and open to the eye of him with whom we have to do*, Heb. iv. 13: nay, then our consciences will be as a thousand witnesses, either for the acquitting or condemning us; and will bring to our remembrance the whole series of our actions as fresh as if they were but newly done. All those sins which we here made it our business to forget as soon as we could, shall then, with all their aggravating circumstances,

be set in order before us ; nay, then shall all our actions, even those that we are most ashamed of, those that we always used the greatest care to conceal from the knowledge of others, be exposed to the view of the whole world. Our hearts shall then be laid open, and angels and men shall see what principles and designs they were that influenced our actions. This the scripture fully assures us of, telling us, that when *God comes to judge the world, he will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart*, 1 Cor. iv. 5. And in another place, *God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*, Eccles. xii. 4.

6. But I hasten to the last particular which the scripture acquaints us with concerning this matter ; and with it I shall shut up this Discourse ; and that is, the final sentence that shall follow upon this examination and discovery of all actions, and the execution of that sentence. This sentence is twofold, according to the two different states of men that shall be found at that day, viz. the sentence of absolution, and that shall be pronounced upon all the godly ; and the sentence of condemnation, and that shall be pronounced upon all the wicked, and upon the apostate angels. Both these we have fully declared in the twenty-fifth of St. Matthew, so often mentioned ; *The King shall say to them on the right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*, ver. 34. And then follows the sentence of condemnation a little further ; *He shall say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye*

cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels, ver. 41. And then, in the last verse, follows the execution of both these sentences, *These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal*.

O the infinite and inexpressible horror, and confusion, and anguish, and despair, that will seize upon all wicked and ungodly persons when this shall come upon them ! When they shall hear the Judge pronounce that terrible sentence, and at the same time find themselves dragged away to suffer it in extremity, *Depart from me ye cursed*. O dreadful words ! depart from him who is the life of our lives ! and without whose presence and comfortable influence it is infinitely more desirable not to be at all, than to live and have the whole world. Time indeed hath been, when they have often bid God to depart from them ; when they desired nothing more than to keep as far from him as they could, and endeavoured nothing more than that he should not be in their thoughts. But they will not always be abused and cheated with these false notions. They will then be awakened, and their understandings will faithfully represent to them what an unspeakable loss it is to be deprived of the presence of God. They will then see clearly (though too late) what a mighty happiness the saints enjoy, in loving, in adoring, in admiring his infinite majesty, and in being filled with the sense of his love, and enraptured with the perpetual emanations of his goodness. They will then find, that to depart from God is to be miserable in the highest degree, is to lose all pleasure, all comfort, all peace, all hopes of these things for ever ; to be exposed to the gnawing of a worm that never

dies ; to be let loose to the whips and the stings, the rage and the fury, of a deeply sensible and too much enlightened conscience. But this is not all, though it be sad enough : to their affliction for what they have lost, what they are deprived of, shall be super-added an exquisite pain to their very senses, that their torments may be every way complete ; *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.* What more terrible to flesh and blood than fire ? But to be tormented in everlasting fire, in fire unquenchable, who can bear the thoughts of it ? For those tender limbs of theirs, which they now use with so much delicacy, to be henceforward stretched out upon a bed of flame : for those palates of theirs, which they are now so careful and curious to gratify, to want hereafter a drop of water, to cool the insupportable heat of them : for them, who in this world minded nothing so much as the living at their ease, and enjoying their pleasures, from henceforth to dwell with everlasting burnings ; to be tumbled down into a lake that burns with fire and brimstone for ever : O how amazing, how intolerable is the very consideration ! especially when we consider what companions, what comforters they are likely to have in this their misery, even no better than the damned fiends : *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels.* These indeed are their proper territories ; this lake of fire was principally designed for them, for their first foul rebellion against God : but God Almighty intended mankind for better fortunes. But since they (those I mean of whom I am now speaking) wilfully forsook their heavenly Father, and made themselves the servants of the Devil, his slaves they shall be to all

eternity; and he will pay them their wages for all the drudgery they have so faithfully done him. But, alas! no otherwise than by adding vinegar to their wounds, by reproaching their folly, and increasing their torments, and making hell, if it be possible, more insupportable than it is.

O now, who can conceive the sad condition of those poor forlorn creatures! Who can number the groans and the plaints, the roarings and the howlings, the curses and imprecations, which, out of the anguish of their souls, they do continually belch out against God, against themselves, and against all the world! O how they do curse their own folly and madness! how bitterly do they reflect upon their past lives! how do they wish that they had thought on these things in time! What would they not give for one day, one hour, of all that precious time that they have lavished away so foolishly, that, if it were possible, they might make their peace with God, and even grow to the ground in humble supplications for his mercy and forgiveness! But, alas! it is too late; the irrevocable sentence is past; their eternal state is concluded; never, never must they hope to change their condition: and this they know. And this is that which every moment adds new torments to their torments. O that we, who now hear these things, would seriously consider them; now, while God affords us our lives, and the means of salvation, and the hopes of his favour. And O that we would consider them so long, till we be effectually wrought upon to change our course of living, (if we do not already live as we should do,) and apply ourselves to a serious and diligent pursuit of holiness and virtue, that we may never come into this place of tor-

ment; but, when our Lord shall come to judge the world, we may be found in the number of *the sheep on his right hand*, upon whom he will pronounce that happy sentence of absolution, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

O blessed, beyond all imagination blessed, are those happy souls to whom these words shall be pronounced! How abundantly will they think themselves rewarded for all the troubles they here endured; for all the pains they took in the ways of virtue and piety; for all the scoffs they met with from profane, irreligious, atheistical men, who laughed at their preciseness, (as they called it,) and their zeal for God and religion!

Their time of trial is now past, and now they come to be crowned. Now do they mount up with Jesus their beloved Master, and *with an innumerable company of angels, and with all the spirits of just men made perfect, into the new Jerusalem*, Heb. xii. 22, 23; into blissful regions, into a country of perpetual light and peace, where there is no darkness, no mists or storms, to which this under world is always obnoxious; *no need of the sun or moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord doth lighten it*, Rev. xxi. 23. Here is the *city of the great King*; the seat of the Majesty of heaven. Here shall they live in his presence, and be in the number of his favourites, and behold the wisdom of his government, and the admirable contrivance of all his works. Here shall they be ravished with the *beauty of his holiness*, and the brightness of his understanding, and the largeness of his love; his uncorrupted justice, and his infinite, unexhausted goodness. Here shall they

love him and their Saviour as much as they are able, and they shall still be able to know him, and to love him more and more. For all their faculties will be enlarged, and grow so capacious, that they will bear some proportion to that infinite good which is to fill them. In a word; here shall they spend a whole eternity in an ecstasy of joy, in an uninterrupted succession of pleasures, in the best natured and most agreeable company in the world; angels, and arch-angels, and prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, all their dear friends and acquaintance, who die in the faith of Christ, and in the fear of God; and all those brave souls likewise whom they have heard or read of, whose virtue and rare actions have made them famous over the world. And the employment of the whole glorious society shall ever be to love and to serve one another as much as ever they can, and all to join together in singing endless praises and *hallelujahs to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for evermore*, Rev. vii. 10.

I can say no more. We are lost if we go further. O thou blessed God, who hast prepared for them that love thee such things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love towards thee, that we, truly repenting of our sins, and quitting all the paths of folly and wickedness, whereby we have gone astray from thee, and seriously endeavouring to keep all thy holy commandments, and thereby shewing that we love thee above all things, may at last obtain those heavenly promises of thine, which exceed all that we can desire: and when our Lord shall come to judge the world, we may be found acceptable in his sight. Amen.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE QUEEN ANNE, 1711.

JOSHUA xxiv. 21.

And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the Lord.

THE occasion of these words was this; Joshua having brought the people of Israel into a peaceable possession of the promised land, and *being now grown old, and ready to leave this world*, chap. xxiii. 1, 2, as the last and greatest kindness he could do for that people, he *calls together all their elders, and their heads, and their judges, and their officers*, ver. 2, chap. xxiv. 1. which represented them, in order to the entering them into a strict covenant that they should give themselves up to the service of God. Being met together, he makes a discourse concerning the great things that God had done for them: he sets before them how that whereas *their forefathers had been idolaters on the other side of the flood*, ver. 2, God, in mercy to them, singled out *Abraham their father, and brought him into the land of Canaan*, and taught him the true religion, and *multiplied his seed*, ver. 3. And after many kindnesses shewed to their predecessors, *he had brought them out of the Egyptian slavery by a mighty hand and stretched-out arm*, ver. 5, 6, 7; had led them marvellously through the wilderness, and

had now at the last, by his (viz. Joshua's) conduct, *brought them safe into a land flowing with milk and honey*, ver. 8—13; notwithstanding all the strength and policy that the neighbouring nations had used to hinder their passage, and all the power that thirty and two kings within the land could make for the destroying of them.—Wherefore having such great obligations laid upon them by God, such as never any nation before them had, they were wondrously ungrateful to their great Benefactor, if they did not yield up themselves entirely to his service, if they did not *fear the Lord, and walk before him in sincerity and truth, and put away the strange gods which their fathers had served*, ver. 14. This is the sum of the first fourteen verses of this chapter. But, continues he in the 15th verse, *If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*. As if he had said, It is not my purpose to do any violence to you, or to force your inclinations. You have heard my arguments. I leave it to you whether you will be persuaded by them. You yourselves must choose whether you will serve the Lord or serve other gods. But I declare to you, whatever you pitch upon, it is my resolution that I and my family will serve the Lord, and him only.

The people, as appears in the two next verses, were perfectly convinced by his discourses, acknowledged the obligations they stood in to the Lord, and were so sensible of them, that they cried out, *God*

forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods, ver. 16. But Joshua thinks fit to try them further: he would not have them ensnared into resolutions, but would have them seriously to consider to what severe things they obliged themselves if they determined their choice to the service of God. To this purpose he tells them, *Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good*, ver. 19, 20. But the people were not discouraged by this, but stood to their first determination, and with one voice cried out in the words of the text, *Nay; but we will serve the Lord*, ver. 21. 24. This was their last resolution; and upon this Joshua made them that day enter *into a covenant* with the Lord, ver. 25.

I doubt not but a great many here present are so well inclined to the service of God, that they are ready to make the same declaration, to take up the same resolution, that the Israelites here did. They are so sensible of the folly and mischievous consequences of a sinful life, and the infinite obligation that God hath laid upon them to live virtuously and religiously, that they do fully purpose, with the grace of God, to quit all their evil courses, and to devote themselves to God's service; to forsake all the idol gods which the men of the world worship, and which they renounced at their baptism, and, as Joshua here words it, *to walk before the Lord* (the remaining part of their days) *in sincerity and truth*, ver. 14. I say, I doubt not but a great many among us are

ready to make such resolutions as these. And, to be sure, whenever they come to the holy sacrament, they do actually make them. May God Almighty bless and prosper all such as are thus religiously disposed; all such as can thus say with the Israelites, *Nay; but we will serve the Lord*. But this it is fit they should be forewarned of, which Joshua insinuates to the Israelites, that it is a much easier matter to make resolutions about serving God, than to perform them after they are made. And consequently they, who mean to have their resolutions come to any effect, will be extremely concerned both to use their utmost prudence and consideration in the forming of them, and their utmost care and diligence in the keeping them afterwards.

These are the two points upon which the success of our pious desires and endeavours doth all in all depend. For which reason I think I cannot do better service to well-disposed persons, than to offer something for their assistance and direction in both these matters.

Two things I shall endeavour at this time :

First, To shew what rules are to be observed by us in the framing our good resolutions. And,

Secondly, What things are to be taken care of after we have framed them, that they may produce real effects.

I begin with the first point, viz.

I. The rules that are to be observed by us in making our resolutions : they are these five following :

1. That a man thoroughly consider the matter he resolves upon, and of the arguments that may be urged for and against it.

2. That he consider likewise his own temper and humour when he doth resolve.

3. That he make his resolutions as particular as may be.

4. That he not only resolve upon the end, but upon the means likewise of attaining that end.

5. That he be prudent in his resolutions, and do not burden himself with unnecessary things.

Of these five particulars as briefly as I can.

1. The first rule is, that we thoroughly consider of the matter we resolve upon, and of the arguments that may be urged for or against it. This, you see, was the method that Joshua took with the children of Israel, when he had a mind to fix them as firmly as was possible to the service of God. He laid before them the difficulty on both sides of the question, and then bid them choose *whom they would serve*. Before he would enter them into this covenant he lays the matter impartially before them; and as on one side he represents to them the infinite obligations they had to engage themselves to God's service, and the mighty advantages they would receive from it; so on the other side he sets before them the difficulties they must expect to encounter if they did engage in it, and that both upon account of the great strictness it required, and of the heavy judgments they brought upon themselves if they were false to their vows: *Ye cannot, says he, serve the Lord: for he is a holy God; a jealous God; he will not pardon your transgressions nor your sins,* ver. 19. Now when he had laid this matter before them, he leaves it to them to determine themselves: *If it seem evil unto you, says he, to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve; whether*

the gods which your fathers served on the other side the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell, ver. 15.

Now thus we must deal with ourselves, if ever we mean to make firm resolutions about any thing. It is the fault and the infelicity of a great many, that they take up resolutions upon the consideration of a very few particulars. They choose their side before they have attended to what may be said on the other side. Now though they happen to choose the right side, yet, when afterwards something comes to be fairly represented to them to the disadvantage of it, which they never considered or thought of before, it often falls out that they are wholly surprised and at a loss; and if the resolutions they have taken up prove to be against the grain of their former customs or inclinations, it is ten to one but they fall to nothing, and nature will have its course, though possibly the difficulty that occasions their relapse is very inconsiderable, and easily answered.

It may be you have spent some time in considering the unexceptionable reasonableness of virtue and religion in general, and this hath made great impressions upon you; especially you are affected with the many comforts and conveniences both as to mind, body, and estate, that it is attended with in this world, besides the vast unspeakable rewards which are promised to all those who practise it in the world to come. Upon these considerations you set up your resolutions: you will forsake all your vicious courses; you will live virtuously, and serve God heartily; ay, that you will. But this is but one side of the case that you have represented to yourselves. Have you on the other hand considered the

pains and the uneasiness that this course of life will put you upon ; especially at the beginning, and in case you have been heretofore engaged in a contrary way? Have you thought what it is *to cut off a right hand*, or *to pluck out a right eye*, (as our Saviour expresseth it, Matt. v. 29. and xviii. 8?) what it is to live in a contradiction to your most natural inclinations, and to debar yourselves of those things that you now most love and hanker after? Besides, are you provided to answer all those objections and arguments which will on every side be made use of to divert you from the course you are undertaking? The question will, without doubt, be put to you, What certainty you have of the truth of this religion that you make such a stir about? Nay, whether it be not probable, that all the business of rewards and punishments in another world is but mere talk and noise, the invention of the priests or statesmen? Is your faith now strong enough to bear up against these assaults? Further yet ; it may be, it will be insinuated to you, that you need not take so much pains, or lead a life of such strictness and regularity and devotion as you aim at, but that you may go to heaven without all this ado. How now are you prepared to repel these temptations?

But if these things do not divert you, are you sure it is not above your strength and ability to go through this work after you have undertaken it? Is it in your power, think you, if you should seriously endeavour it, to get such a mastery over your passions, and to live a life of such temperance, and chastity, and humility, and charity, and resignation to God as your religion will oblige you to? But admitting that nothing of this discourages you, are

you sure, in the last place, that you are proof against the many outward difficulties and discouragements that possibly may be thrown in your way upon account of your religion? For it is not always sunshine in this world with pious men, though for the most part it is: times have come, and may come again, when the best treatment you will meet with for your strict profession of religion will be the derision and reproaches and persecutions of all about you. Thus it fared with our Saviour, and with the best of his disciples for some years together. How now are you armed, how are you prepared against these attacks? It is impossible you should be to any purpose, unless you have well thought of them beforehand. But if you have considered them, and yet find your resolutions firm and unshaken, it is a good sign they are rightly made. On the contrary, if you have not considered them, it is to be feared your good purposes may fail you in the hour of temptation; and you will meet with no better success in your undertaking, than that foolish builder in the Gospel that our Saviour speaks of, who began *to build a tower, but did not sit down first and compute the charges it would put him to, and whether he had ability to support them; but laid the foundation at adventure, and afterwards was not able to finish it. So that all who beheld it began to mock him, saying, This man began to build, but was not able to finish, Luke xiv. 28, 29, 30.*

2. But, secondly, as we ought to have a particular consideration of things themselves, so also ought we to have of our own humours and tempers when we are a making good resolutions. By not attending to this, a man is often deceived in his devout purposes,

taking those to be firm and sincere ones which really are not so. We are not always equally capable of religious impressions, but are much better disposed for them at some times than at others. A good book or a warm discourse may often put a man into a strange, devout frame, and then he can resolve any thing; but when he is cool again he has forgot all. A sharp affliction likewise, or a fit of sickness, or the apprehension of any sudden danger, doth often make us wonderful serious and sensible of our follies past, and full of good purposes to change our course of life: but then these purposes and impressions do usually vanish with the things that caused them; when the present apprehensions and terrors are over, we are the same men that we were before. Nay, even a man's sins, and the full gratifications of his lusts, will naturally work in him a present detestation of them. Having newly satisfied his appetites, all his desires and expectations are over, and the man is cloyed, and then he begins to reflect upon the vanity and sinfulness of such kind of courses, and he resolves to be guilty of them no more. But this lasts but for a short while; as his usual temper and temptations return, so the same appetites return with them, and they must again, in spite of his late resolution, have their usual satisfactions. It is no wonder that all the resolutions that are made in such circumstances as these prove generally very idle and insignificant; for the man is not himself when he makes them: he is in a preternatural state; he is in the heat and transport of a passion. If he will resolve to purpose, he must resolve in cold blood, as well as when he is heated by some extraordinary occasion.

Never therefore let any one trust to his pious re-

solutions, unless he have tried how they appear to him, how he approves of them, how they fit his mind in all kind of tempers and humours. It is in this case as it is in matters of sense; there are some objects which, if you look upon only in one kind of light, you will hardly avoid your being mistaken in your judgment about them. As you must put them into all their various postures, so must you view them in all sorts of lights, if you mean to form true, steady ideas of them.

I am not indeed at all for discouraging those devotional fits, (as I may call them;) on the contrary, I would have every one do their endeavours to raise up themselves into that temper as often as they can. For such sudden heats do really sometimes prove the beginnings of a lasting virtue; they are the occasions that put a man upon thinking. And the impressions that are then left upon his spirit (if there be due care taken to cherish and preserve them) may be effectual, by the grace of God, for the new modelling his mind, and quite altering the whole state and frame of his life. But this I say, If we mean that our resolutions should be pertinent, and not vanish like the morning dew, we must not think it sufficient to resolve in a fit or an humour, but we must, when we are cool and sedate, and the accidental violence is off from our spirits, review our resolutions, and canvass them over and over again. And if we then find ourselves to approve of them, and in all tempers and dispositions and circumstances have the same earnestness and desire and vigour of mind to pursue them, it is a good sign that they were well formed, and that we shall proceed prosperously in them.

3. But another thing fit to be observed is, that we do not content ourselves with resolving in general, but that our resolutions be as particular as may be. It is not enough to make our purposes in the gross; to say, as the Israelites did to Joshua upon the forementioned occasion, *Nay; but we will serve the Lord*; we will be good; we will break off our sins, and enter upon a new course of life. Alas! all this is but shooting at rovers. If we mean to hit the mark, we must take more particular aims. He who thinks to get the mastery over his sins and evil habits only by making general resolutions against them, is just like the man who hopes to be victorious in the fight he is engaged in merely by making a general stout resistance against his enemies, though he bestow all his blows at random, neither attending to the advantages that are offered him, nor regarding the disadvantages to which he himself must lie open. It will therefore concern us, when we are framing resolutions to live a holy life, to examine well the state of our own souls; to see where we are weak and obnoxious, and where we are pretty well able to defend ourselves, and accordingly to make provision; to inquire what particular sins our temper, or our education, or our business, or our evil customs do most incline us to; what are the most reigning lusts and vices in us, and to fortify our minds most particularly against them. Do we find that worldly-mindedness, covetousness, or the distrust of God's providence, is the prevailing sin that enslaves us? Let us, in the forming resolutions, have a special regard to the subduing that vice. Are we by our tempers inclined to ease, or pleasure, or too free a gratification of our sensual

appetites? and this humour of ours we find doth betray us into the great inconveniences of our lives? Why, above all things, we should take care to keep a strict guard over ourselves as to that point, and endeavour to work our minds to the strongest resolutions of a severe sobriety and temperance. And so in all other things.

But this is not all I intend under this consideration. Though it is fit, that in making up our resolution, we should have a principal regard to the leading, predominant sins of our life, and those infirmities of our temper that do us most mischief, yet we must not neglect to provide against our other sins and weaknesses: and therefore it will not be amiss, when we are about this great work, that we make it our business to search, as particularly as we can, into all the several heads and branches of our duty, both towards God, and towards our neighbour, and towards ourselves: and when we have done this, to call ourselves to account how we have performed it; what part of it we have most notoriously omitted, and what part of it we have transgressed by notorious, actual sins; and then, accordingly as our conscience gives in evidence to us concerning these matters, we are to take up particular resolutions to be careful for the future, both to do those things which we find we have hitherto been negligent in, and to avoid those things wherein we have hitherto transgressed. By observing this course, we shall have done ourselves very great service, whenever we come to bring our resolutions into action. For this is the best method both to secure our performance of them, and also to perform them with the least labour and trouble. For by this means, as we

are especially fortified against those enemies of ours that are most treacherous, and have most power to do us mischief; (viz. the sins of our tempers and constitutions;) so also are we provided against every other lust that make an assault upon us, nor will it be in the power of any of them easily to surprise us.

4. Another thing we are to observe in the forming our resolutions is this, that we should not only resolve upon such and such particular things to be done or to be avoided by us, but we should also consider how those things are to be done or to be avoided; what are the properest methods and expedients for the effecting of our purposes, and to resolve upon them also. He who resolves upon the end, and pitcheth not upon the means for the attaining that end, doth but half his work. You find, it may be, that the great sin of your life is intemperance, or that which we call too much good fellowship; and you make most strict and particular resolutions to avoid that sin for the future: if now you would take the right course to have those resolutions effectual, it will be fit you should inquire what are the great occasions and temptations that draw you into this sin. After you have found them, examine further whether those occasions and temptations are of your own making, and such as you may easily prevent or avoid if you please, or whether they are unavoidably incident to your business or calling, or the like. If they be of the former sort, you must resolve quite to cut them off, or to keep out of the way of them. It is an idle thing to think of practising sobriety and temperance so long as we encourage the occasions, and throw our-

selves into the temptations that cause our intemperance. But if we find that these temptations are really such as we cannot avoid, but they lie in the course of our necessary business and employments, then we are to secure ourselves against this vice another way ; not by flying the temptations, but by standing upon our guard, which is done either by wholly denying our appetites in what they desire, or by confining them to such precise measures of meat and drink, which they shall not exceed. And thus again : Is anger and wrathfulness and impatience the great sin we mean to set ourselves against ? Why, it is not enough to resolve, I will not be angry, nothing shall put me into a passion ; but we must likewise resolve thus ; Such and such things are very apt to provoke me, and put me out of temper, and therefore I will keep out of the way of them. Or, I find that it is the too sudden and free venting of my mind when I am provoked, that blows me into those unseemly fits of rage and fury ; and therefore I am resolved, when the next provocation is offered me, I will seal up my lips for some time, and either speak nothing at all, or speak mild and gentle words.

Thus should we do as to every instance of our duty we resolve upon, or every sin we resolve against ; inquire into the best means and expedients for the securing of the one and mortifying the other, and put them into our resolutions also.

5. But, in the last place, in the forming our resolutions we must be mighty careful not to clog them with too many needless, uncommanded things. What is absolutely necessary for the securing our virtue and obedience to God's laws, it is fit should be very firmly and particularly resolved by us. But for other

things, though they may be sometimes very convenient, and may prove, if discreetly used, excellent instruments for the promoting virtue and goodness ; yet, if they be no direct parts of our duty imposed upon us by God, or necessarily required as means for the performing that duty, it will be very dangerous to tie them upon ourselves, especially for any long time. Let no man therefore, especially no young beginner in religion, easily put more impositions upon himself than God has put upon him ; let him not abridge himself of that liberty which Christ hath left him. If he bind himself to all that is barely needful to preserve his innocence and secure the performance of his duty, it is enough for one in his circumstances. But if he will make resolutions, that he will, for instance, spend so great a portion of his time in prayer, that he will read so much of a good book every day, that he will fast so often, that he will wholly abstain from such and such particular things that are not in themselves evil ; I say, in my opinion, he doth not act prudently in so doing ; for these kind of things do generally prove a snare to those who use them. They make the work of religion intolerably heavy and troublesome ; and a man, in a little time, grows so weary of them, that he repents he ever bound up himself to them : and it is ten to one but in some humour or other he will launch out and break all his fences of this kind. And when he hath done so, it is odds but he goes further, and lets fall those very resolutions he made of necessary, indispensable virtue and holiness. Certainly the being false to his vows of one kind will mightily dispose him to be so to those of the other, since he hath obliged himself equally

to both. And sad experience shews that this indeed too often comes to pass. If therefore a man thinks of tying up himself as to these indifferent matters, as believing that the so doing will be a good guard to his virtue, let him take good advice before he doth it; and especially let him oblige himself but for a little time, since, if he finds his resolutions expedient, he may repeat them when he pleases. But if he make resolutions for a long time, he cannot, if he finds them inconvenient, so easily undo them again.

What I have hitherto said has been wholly concerning the forming of our resolutions of virtue and an holy life. But there are some things that concern the government of ourselves after we have actually taken up those resolutions, that are every whit as necessary to the good success of them as the former points.

II. To give you some account of these is the second point I undertook in this Discourse; of which I shall speak very briefly.

1. In the first place therefore, let us not think it sufficient to have made wise and strong and good resolutions once for all, unless we frequently renew them. The firmest and the best contrived purposes will, in time and by degrees, grow very feeble and languid, and lose all the force they should have upon us, if we do not take care to put new life into them, by over and over again impressing them upon our own minds, and repeating all the arguments and considerations that at first prevailed with us to take them up. It will therefore highly concern us, after we are once entered into hearty and settled resolutions to serve God, never to let them cool, but to

keep up the fire that is kindled in our hearts, by constantly ministering fuel to it. To this end, let us, every day we rise, enter into a serious consideration of the obligations we have laid upon ourselves; let us ask our hearts how they now stand inclined towards them. They were very forward at first to undertake the service of God; do they still continue so? are they as full of hatred and detestation of sin, and as vigorously bent to pursue the paths of virtue and religion, as they were, when they lately entered into covenant with God? If we find that they flag and waver, and cannot answer us with that briskness that before they did, We will be good, we will live virtuously, we will serve God; let us ply them with arguments; let us lay before them the mighty obligations they had at first to undertake this great work, and convince them, that they have the same obligations to persevere in it. Let us beg of them to consider how infinitely good God is in himself, and how infinitely kind and bountiful he hath been to us every moment of our lives; and consequently how just and reasonable it is, that we should for ever give up ourselves to the service of him. Let us represent to them, how righteous, how good, how equitable all his laws are; how much the observance of them tends to our advantage; inso-much that it is infinitely more our interest than God's that we should yield a due obedience to them. Let us persuade them of the great folly and vanity, and the intolerable mischiefs and inconveniences, that do attend those courses we have formerly pursued, and which it seems they have now a desire to return to again. Let us lay before them how much pain, and grief, and anguish, and sorrow

it cost our blessed Saviour to redeem us from our vain conversation ; and to purchase for us the pardon of those cursed sins of ours, which we are now meditating to take again into our bosom. If all this will not work upon our hearts, let them be further remembered that they are now actually engaged in God's service, and have, by the most solemn vows in the world, obliged themselves to continue in it, and therefore it is now too late to look back. To be guilty of so base a perfidiousness, as it will be a most horrid crime, so will the vengeance of God not fail to pursue us for it. Besides, now we are in a fair way to attain heaven and eternal happiness, a good beginning being in a manner half the work : but if we fall back, we have lost all the pains we have already taken in raising up ourselves to this pitch, and are but just where we were before we begun this business. And who knows whether we shall ever be able to begin it again? Who knows whether ever God will again afford us either the grace or the means to do it? If, notwithstanding all this, your hearts are yet heavy and untoward, and unwilling to go on in this work, you must tell them plainly, that they must go on, there is an absolute necessity for it. This is a business that concerns you as much as your souls are worth ; your everlasting salvation or damnation depends upon it, and therefore there is no dallying in the matter. In a word, we must never leave ourselves till we have so fired our hearts, that they resolve with all alacrity to go on as they have begun : that they tell us peremptorily, I will go to my Father : I will be good, whatever it costs me : I will stand to my vows, what opposition soever I meet with : I will never

forsake the service of my God ; and particularly this following day I will so take heed to all my ways, that I will not offend against any of my purposes.

O, my brethren, if we would but thus frequently commune with our own hearts, and daily thus reinforce our good resolutions, how easy would it be for us to be good ! how easy to vanquish all our evil habits, and to triumph over every thing that opposeth us ! nay, I may say, how hard a matter would it be for us to be bad ! We should subvert all difficulties, and every day grow better and better, till at last we had got as obstinate, confirmed habits of virtue and goodness as other men now have, or we ourselves before had, of vice and sin.

2. Especially if we join another thing, which I come now to mention ; viz. if we mean our resolutions should bring forth those good fruits we make them for, we must remember that there is another necessary duty to be performed by us, and that is, daily and constant prayer to God Almighty for his grace and holy Spirit to go along with us in the great work we have undertaken. Alas ! we are of ourselves poor frail creatures ; the firmest resolutions we have made, the strongest guard we have placed about ourselves, will not protect us from the deceitfulness of our own hearts, and the subtilty of our enemies, and the strength of the temptations with which we are continually assaulted, without the assistance and influence of the holy Spirit of Christ. Now the only method we can take for the alluring that divine Spirit down into our hearts, is, as our Lord Jesus hath told us, humble and serious and fervent prayer. God will no more deny that good Spirit to all who thus ask it, than a father will

deny bread to his hungry children, when they cry for it. If ever therefore we mean to proceed happily in what we have undertaken, and to bring our resolutions to effect, let this sink down into our hearts. We must be no strangers at the throne of grace; we must apply there every day as constantly as we do every day eat, drink, and sleep; we must no more live a day without praying, than we do without taking our food and nourishment. And when we are before God in this holy exercise, whether it be in the church, or in our closets, or in any other place, O let us then and there pour out our souls to him with all humility, acknowledging our own vileness, and representing to him our various wants and necessities, and begging a supply of them from his infinite bounty, with as much earnestness and concernedness, as an hungry beggar begs alms at our doors. Let us tell him how extremely sensible we are of our great infirmities and easiness of nature. We dare not trust our own hearts; we find we have no strength of ourselves to do any good action, much less to accomplish so great a work as we have undertaken; and therefore that we cast ourselves entirely upon him. It is his work that we are engaged in; and therefore we cannot doubt he will carry us through it. We have no expectancy from ourselves, or any other creature, but depend upon him alone, and his aids from above. It is he, who of his great mercy hath put these good purposes and resolutions into our hearts; and blessed be his name that he hath done so: and now we desire nothing so much in the world as that we may for ever continue in them. For Christ Jesus sake therefore we beseech him that he would not forsake us, that he

would not withdraw his grace from us, and leave us to ourselves; but that he would continue and improve it, that he would *carry on and perfect that good work he hath been pleased already to begin in us.*

O, my brethren, such breathings of our souls after God as these are never sent up in vain! They pierce the heavens, and are returned with such gentle showers of grace and influence from above, as will not fail both to refresh our languishing souls, and to enable us to bear such good fruits (if we be not wanting in our endeavours) as shall answer all our own designs, and be acceptable to the great Husbandman, *who hath sown the good seed in our hearts.*

3. But, lastly, I have but one thing more to add to what I have said about this business of resolutions, and I have done. You have, it may be, oftentimes before this made many solemn resolutions and vows to forsake your sins, particularly such as you have found to be the growing, prevailing hinderances of goodness in you, and to enter into a stricter way of living; but you have found that these resolutions have hitherto been ineffectual, and that, notwithstanding them, you are still but the same persons that you were before.

That which I have to say in this matter is this; that this ought not to discourage you from trying again. If your good resolutions have not been hitherto successful, it is fit, nay it is necessary, that you should resolve so long till they be so. Once more therefore, in God's name, enter upon the work; only use more care and diligence and consideration in the framing your resolutions, and set yourselves more seriously to the performing of them, and, my

life for yours, they will, with the grace of God, prosper in your hands.

But this is not all I meant to say under this head. As none, who have formerly resolved to serve God, and have failed in their undertakings, ought to be discouraged from making new resolutions to serve him; so none, who are now entering into engagements of that kind, should be discouraged from going on with the work they have engaged in, though they now and then, through the violence of temptation, or the strength of their corruptions, do act against what they have resolved. The not attending to this is oftentimes the cause that most excellent beginnings in virtue come to nothing. After we have once or twice broken our purposes, we are apt either to think that all our obligations to them are cancelled, or we think it in vain to pursue them any further; and so we break loose into all the extravagancies that our ungoverned appetites and inclinations can prompt us to: but this is the worst reasoning in the world. If we would act like men of sense, when our resolutions are too weak to bridle our appetites, and keep us within bounds, we should rather endeavour to strengthen them than to cast them quite off. If ever therefore you mean to be so virtuous, so good as you resolve to be, so to serve God as you purpose now to do, it will concern you particularly not to be too much discouraged or cast down, if you should now and then fly out into actions that you have resolved against; but rather to take that occasion of renewing your vows and resolutions, and walking more carefully for the future. By this means you will not only not suffer by your sins and frailties, but turn them to your great advantage.

I beseech you remember this, and I conclude with it; that the greatest hurt or mischief that any particular act of sin can do us, lies not in the guilt that is contracted by it, but in the tendency it has to unhinge our vows and purpose, and to make us fall back into a life of carelessness and sensuality and irreligion. If we can but rescue ourselves from these ill consequences of it, and proceed notwithstanding in our course of an holy and virtuous life, the sin will never be remembered against us in the day of judgment; but we shall, for all that, if we persevere in our endeavours, find an admittance into the everlasting kingdom.

A S E R M O N

ON

COLOSSIANS III. 2.

Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.

THESE words, though, as they lie in the chapter, they bear the form of a precept or exhortation, yet we may consider them as an answer to the great inquiry of mankind; a divine resolution of that important case which every man puts to himself. The great end that all mankind pursue is to be as happy as they can. This we are all agreed upon. But as to the way of attaining this happiness, or the things in which it doth consist, about these we differ. For men finding in themselves appetites and desires of several sorts to be gratified, and necessities of sundry kinds to be supplied, and accordingly there being so many kinds of objects that tend to the gratification of those appetites, and to the supplying those necessities, which present themselves under the notion of *goods*, (as indeed they are,) it can scarce be avoided but that men will differ, if not in their opinions, yet in their choice and determination, which of these various appetites they will lay out themselves in the satisfying of; which of those goods they will make it their business to furnish themselves with. And hence it comes to pass that so many different designs are driven on in the world; and all of them too in order to the same end; that

is, the living a happy life : though it is sadly true, that far the greatest number of men do exceedingly fail of their end.

The great concernment then of every man, when he comes to the use of his reason, is to choose right for himself; to propose such designs to pitch upon, such objects to lay out himself upon, as will not fail to secure to him the great end, viz. the being as happy as he can be.

Now all the objects in the world that can be supposed to recommend themselves to our desires or pursuit, as the things that will make us happy, (how many and various soever the particulars be, yet,) we shall find that they may conveniently enough be reduced to two heads, *the things of the earth*, and *the things above*, as the apostle in my text distributes them. So that between these two sorts of things will lie the competition.

By *the things of the earth* we may understand all sorts of goods that are here about us, that affect our senses, that gratify our animal appetites, that do directly and immediately tend to the preservation or well-being of our bodily life; such as riches, pleasures, honours, knowledge of arts and sciences, and the like. By *the things above*, we understand not only the glorious rewards which we expect after death in the kingdom of heaven, but also all those qualities and dispositions of mind which do prepare us for, and make us capable of those rewards, such as virtue and goodness and the fear of God. In a word, by the former we understand all those things that do concern our bodies, or our outward man; by the latter, all those things that do concern our souls, or our inward man.

Now we do not so oppose these two kinds of things as to make our pursuit or acquisition of the one of them incompatible with our pursuit or acquisition of the other. The question is not whether, in order to our happiness, we are so wholly to attend one as altogether to neglect the other. No; *the things on earth*, and *the things above*, have both the notion of good, and therefore are both desirable, and therefore may be both laboured after, and may, at least in some degree, be attained; and when they are attained, may be enjoyed; and when they are enjoyed, we may take delight and complacency in that enjoyment. But the point lies here; which of these, in order to our happiness, we are to set our affections upon: that is to say, since every man who doth not live by chance, and is not like a brute, perfectly acted by things without him, doth propose to himself some design to pursue as the great business of his life, and upon the effecting of which he takes his happiness mainly to depend; and what he thus makes his chiefest business is preferred by him before all other ends, takes up the greatest share of his thoughts and labours and endeavours, while his other projects give way to this, and are managed in subordination to it. (No man being able to drive on several different designs with the highest degree of earnestness and fervour of mind at the same time.) And since, lastly, no man can make any thing his main design but it will fall under one of these two heads, either *the things of the earth*, or *the things above*, the great question is, which of these two kinds of things are to have the preeminence in our choice; which of them, if we will act like reasonable men, and consult our own

happiness and advantage as much as we can, we are to pitch upon as the main standing business of our lives, the thing we live for, the thing we will labour after in the first place?

This is the great inquiry: and this the apostle resolves in my text, when he adviseth us to *set our affections on the things above, and not on the things on the earth*. The reasonableness of which advice of his it is the business of the following Discourse to make out.

In order whereunto I shall shew, that all those motives and arguments which do usually prevail with mankind for the determining their choice to this particular thing rather than another, are much stronger on the part of *the things above* than on the part of *the things of the earth*: which if it be made to appear, the consequence will be, that that man is a fool, and acts against his own interest, against the common reason of mankind, nay, against those rules that he himself in all other cases proceeds by, who *sets his affections on the things of the earth*, and doth not make it the main business of his life to serve God, to get virtuous habits, and by that means to secure his spiritual and eternal interests. Now for the making this good, there needs no more than to lay these following things before you.

I. First of all: when two things are proposed to our choice, we use to consider which of them we have most in our power, which of them we are in the likeliest way to attain to, if we set about it. Now supposing those things to be equally good and equally desirable, yet if we can certainly say of one of them, This good I am sure to make mine own, if I will use my endeavour for the obtaining it, but

cannot say the same of the other thing, this alone is enough to determine a considering man to which of those two goods he is to give the preference in his choice. There is no doubt but, all other things equal, every wise man will reject that which he is uncertain whether he shall obtain or no, and apply himself to that which he is certain he may obtain if he pleases.

Let this now be applied to our present case. Here are, on one hand, the things of the world, viz. wealth, honours, pleasures, and abundance of other such things as tend to make our outward condition easy and happy and prosperous; and these do tempt us to lay out ourselves upon them. Here are, on the other hand, virtue and piety, and the eternal happiness that is consequent upon them; and these do likewise invite us to make them our principal aim. We will suppose at this time both these things to be equally good, and equally to recommend themselves to our choice, (and thus much at least we may be allowed to suppose.) The question therefore is, to which of these two we will chiefly direct our study and pursuit? I say, if we will be governed by the foregoing rule, we shall of necessity resolve upon these latter, because they are certainly in our power; but the former are not. No man can say beforehand, I am sure I shall compass such an estate that I aim at, or attain to such preferments which are in my eye, or be successful in this or the other design of pleasure that I propose to myself. But every man in the world may say, I am certain I may be good if I have a mind: I am certain that I may live righteously and soberly and religiously if I please; and, if I do so, I am equally certain that

God will take me to his mercy and favour both here and hereafter. And the reason is clear; the former things depend upon a hundred accidental circumstances, none of which are at our command. Abundance of things, which we never dreamed of, come between us and our designs of that nature; nay, though those designs were as well laid, and as carefully managed, as the wit of man can devise; and this the experience of the world doth every day make good. But now the other sort of things; to be temperate, and charitable, and chaste, and devout, to furnish our souls with all the virtuous habits that will recommend us to God's favour, these are not subject to such contingencies; they depend only upon ourselves and the grace of God. No outward agent, no cross posture of circumstances, can defeat our labours and endeavours after them. We may undoubtedly, if we please, intend them sincerely, and pursue them industriously; and if we do so, we may undoubtedly expect the grace of God to further and assist us; (for he hath solemnly promised it;) and if so, what thing is there in the world that can render our designs ineffectual?

II. But supposing the *things above and the things on earth* were equally in our power, (which you see they are not;) supposing that every man may be as certain of succeeding in all his worldly designs, as in those relating to his soul; yet which of these will require the greater pains? Which of these ends can be served with most ease, and with the least difficulty? This is another thing, which, when two designs, different from each other, are proposed to us, we usually inquire after, before we fix upon either. And surely, if the difference between them lies in

nothing else but this, all the world will agree, that that good, which is most easily come by, is to be preferred before that which cannot be had without more pains and difficulty. Now let us examine, whether upon this account, as well as the former, the goods of our souls do not much more recommend themselves to our choice and pursuit, than those of the body. And for the adjusting of this, we need only ask these questions: Which of the two will require more skill and application of mind? Which of the two will engage us in more labour and toil of body? And which of the two will take up more of our time for the compassing of them?

1. Now as to the degree of skill required to the successful prosecution of the one or the other, there is no comparison between them. Virtue and goodness, every body knows, are simple things, and the way to them lies plain and even before us. There needs no great depth of parts, no shrewdness and subtlety of understanding, no curious plots and contrivances for the attaining of them. Every one hath skill enough to be virtuous, if he bring but a good will to it: nor is any man ever at a loss what course to take, what methods to follow, for the bringing about his purpose. In this case, honesty and sincerity of heart is all that is required. But it is quite otherwise with our worldly designs; for the compassing them there is need of a great deal of art. Every man is not presently fit to go about them. Abundance of cunning is required to the dextrous management of them. A man must bend his brains to them, as well as his inclinations. He must study, and think, and contrive, and toss things in his head a hundred ways, and all this little enough

for the putting his business into any forwardness. Nay, and oftentimes when he hath done all this, he will still stick in the briers, and be at a loss which way to go on. Nor is it thus only with the greater and more difficult designs of human life, such as the attainment of power and dignity and riches, but almost every petty project that a man busies himself about. As the things of the world go, the managing of a very trivial business, or the prosecuting some very inconsiderable design, doth sufficiently exercise a man's wit and invention, and he finds difficulty enough in going through it. So that in this respect *the things above* have certainly the advantage of the *things on the earth*, viz. in point of easiness of acquisition.

2. But this is not all. Let us see next, whether of the two will engage a man in more action and labour and toil for the obtaining of them. But neither will this bear any dispute. For there are none, who understand any thing of the world, but must be sensible what a deal of pains a man must take who means to thrive in his calling; or who proposeth to be rich, or who intends to get together a great stock of learning or knowledge, or who resolves indeed successfully to prosecute any design of pleasure, or ambition, or the like. How much rest must he lose! what a bustle and hurry is he almost continually in! what drudgery and labour is he exposed to! what uneasy, unagreeable tasks is he frequently forced to undergo! And he feels the effects of all this in the weariness and consumption of spirits, which his over-harassing himself doth frequently bring upon him.—But now there is none of this fatigue, none of this tugging and turmoil in

pursuing the designs of virtue. There the more still and quiet and composed a man is, the better is his work likely to go on. No action of religion doth engage a man in any hard toil or labour, or disturb his rest, or put him to the inconveniences of weariness or ill hours. The truth is, virtuous habits are not so much attained by action and labour, as by suspending our action, and ceasing from labour: and it is vice only, or our worldly concerns, that puts us upon taking pains. As for instance; would I be temperate? I have nothing to do but to cease eating and drinking when nature is satisfied; but to be intemperate, engages me to take pains in the oppressing my stomach with loads of meat and drink. Would a man be chaste and pure? he hath nothing to do but to sit still, and to keep his thoughts at home. But to manage an intrigue of lust destroys his ease and peace, and puts him upon many toils and difficulties. Would a man exercise meekness and patience? it is done by saying or doing nothing when he is provoked. But to be angry and revengeful sets all the powers of his soul and body in a hurry and agitation, and a man takes a great deal of pains to trouble and torment himself. This great advantage there is in the pursuit of the ways of virtue, and the happiness of the other world, which neither any vicious, no, nor any worldly designs can pretend to have.

3. But if it be still a question whether *the things of the earth*, or *the things above*, are to be come by most easily, and with the least difficulty, let it be further considered, whether of them do take up more of our time for the compassing of them. If it appears that things temporal necessarily do so, then

it will be no longer a question; for it is plain, in point of easiness, that the advantage will lie on the part of things spiritual. Now that they do so cannot be doubted by any one, who considers that the pursuit of our worldly designs (if we mean to be successful in them to that degree we usually propose to ourselves) doth, and always will employ much the greatest part of our lives. Who can hope to be rich, or great, or learned, or serve any other considerable secular end, but he must in a manner be obliged wholly to attend upon that very thing? Nay, a great many are forced to be such slaves to their business, and to their designs, that they can scarce allow themselves leisure to take the ordinary refreshments of nature, *rising up early, and taking rest late, and continually eating the bread of carefulness*, as the Psalmist expresses it, Ps. cxxvii. 2. And this too, many a time, for the getting them a very ordinary livelihood: whereas the business of religion doth not thus enslave us. Nay, so far from that, a moderate portion of our daily time, duly set apart, and carefully employed, will not fail, with the grace of God, to secure to us all the interests of our souls, both in this world and that which is to come. Even those hours, which a great many men may well spare from their business, and that time which lies upon the hands of others, and which they spend either impertinently or viciously; I say, was this well husbanded to the purposes of virtue, it would make a man everlastingly happy. So little doth religion enthrall mankind, or the offices of it devour their time.

All these things now considered, we cannot but be fully convinced, that as *the things above*, the

concernments of our souls, virtue and goodness, and eternal salvation, are much more certain to be attained, if we labour after them, than *the things of this world*; so are they also to be attained with a great deal less trouble and difficulty. And therefore, supposing them to be but equally good, and equally desirable with the other, we must act against the common notion and practice of mankind, if we do not rather *set our affection* and fix our designs upon them, than upon *the things on the earth*. And this is the second thing I had to offer upon this argument.

III. But, thirdly, we have hitherto put *the things above and the things on the earth* upon the same level, as to their intrinsic value; we have hitherto supposed them to be both equally good and equally desirable. But I desire it may be considered, that this is by no means a fair supposition. There is a vast difference between the goodness of the one and of the other. The one are always good; the other only contingently so. The one always promote our happiness; the other often prove evil and mischievous to us. There is no man can say beforehand, of any temporal design that he drives on, that he shall certainly be the better if he succeeds in it: for it may, and often doth happen, that he is the worse. But, on the contrary, we may always say truly of spiritual things, the more of them that we purchase to ourselves, the better and the happier we are.

Piety, virtue, and goodness are things desirable for themselves: they can never come amiss to any man. He who hath them shall never be a loser by them, will never repent that he laid out his pains and study

in the acquisition of them. They recommend themselves to the reason and understanding of mankind ; and no peculiarity of temper, no posture of affairs, no outward condition, can render them useless to us. Nay, whatever our external circumstances be, we shall always receive great benefit and advantage from them. The more piously we live, the more we love God, and do good in the world ; the more temperate and humble and charitable we are, still the more happy and the better pleased we find ourselves to be, whatever change there happens in our outward condition and circumstances of life.

But it is often quite otherwise with the other sort of things ; they are not good but in certain cases : they are not valuable for themselves, but for other ends and purposes which they serve to : and there must be the concurrence of abundance of contingent circumstances to make them fit or convenient or useful to us. Take those of them that make the greatest noise and show in the world ; those of them that are generally accounted the most desirable, most courted by mankind, (such as greatness, honour, and power, and the affluence of all things, that make either for pomp or pleasure.) Doth not the experience of the world make good, that after a man hath spent a great deal of time and pains in the pursuit of them, and with much ado has obtained what his heart desired, yet they generally come very much short of his expectation ? nay, where he once finds in them the good that he promised himself, he ten times fails of it ; nay, he not only finds his expectations defeated, but, to his cost, he sees that the things which looked very lovely and charming before he had them, after he is in possession of them appear quite with

another face: he finds they are so far from contributing to the bettering of his condition, that they render it worse. That good which all the world admired and cried up, and he, upon the noise, was so alarmed, that he was resolved to have it, whatever it cost him; now that he has it, he feels that he is more uneasy than he was before. It either suits not with his temper, or it involves him in a multitude of cares and anxieties, of troubles and vexations, which before he was unacquainted with, and which render his life miserable. Or, lastly, it engages him in such follies and vices and debaucheries, as perhaps, had he been in another condition, he had never been guilty of, and which at last end in his ruin and destruction. Thus it is often with the secular designs we pursue. Though the things we labour after appear very convenient and desirable at a distance, yet, alas! we know not but that the next moment after we possess them we shall be heartily weary of them, and repent that we spent so much pains about them. Only virtuous habits and a pure conscience no man ever found a burden to him; no man ever grudged the pains he took about them; no man ever found them unfit for his circumstances, or wished to be rid of them.

IV. But, fourthly, when we compare two goods, in order to our choosing which of them we should apply ourselves to, we do not only examine which of them is really best for us, but also which of them is the most durable good; which of them is most in our power to keep after we are possessed of it. No man will lay out as much cost on an estate whose title may be called in question, and of which he may be dispossessed in a little time, as he would upon that

which he is morally sure is indisputably good to him and his heirs ; nay, though the estate whose title is litigable was much better in present than the other : in this case nature would have its course. The man who is concerned would undoubtedly say, Give me a certainty, though it be little, rather than an uncertain estate, though of much greater value. Now why should we not reason thus in the great debate between the concernments of our souls and bodies, as we do in every petty purchase we make ? If we would, I dare say it would be no conjecture on which side the victory would remain. Let us suppose again (which yet, you see, is not true) that those worldly designs we propose to ourselves will, if we can accomplish them, really prove advantageous to us, and answer all our expectations ; and we can say no more of the things of the Spirit ; let them therefore once again, as to this point, be equal ; yet whether of them can we best secure to ourselves for futurity ? Alas ! there is no man, that knows the world, but must needs acknowledge that all things in it are variable and uncertain ; are ours to-day, and gone to-morrow. There is no temporal good whatsoever that a man can truly call his own, there being an hundred contingencies that may the next moment deprive him of it. But it is not thus with spiritual things : they are out of the reach of fortune ; they are not obnoxious either to decays, or casualties, or to the violence of others. It is not in the power of the whole world to take them from us after we are once possessed of them. A thief may rob me of my money, but he cannot steal my virtue from me. I may, by a turn of state, lose my greatness or my preferments, and become low and despised ; but the worst of my

enemies cannot destroy the peace and content of my mind, which arises from the reflection upon my good actions, and the hopes of a happy life after this. Sickness or age may make me lose the comeliness of my person, but they can never alter the complexion of my mind. A war or a pestilence may divorce me from my wife and children, from my dearest friends or relations, but they can never separate me from my patience and courage, from the love of my God and my acquiescence in his providence, and the hopes of his favour in another world. Since therefore the matter clearly stands thus, as to things spiritual and things temporal, let all the world judge whether of these a man in reason ought to *set his affections on* ; whether it be not extremely absurd to *labour more for the meat that perisheth*, than for that *which endureth to life everlasting*, John vi. 27 ; to *lay up to ourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal*, without being solicitous of *laying up to ourselves treasures in heaven*, Matt. vi. 19, 20. which are not subject to any of these inconveniences.

V. But, fifthly, let it be considered, that *the things above*, that is to say, those accomplishments which recommend us to God, and make us capable of the rewards of the other world, as they are more durable, more pertinent than *the things on the earth* ; so also are they, in their own nature, more noble and excellent. (For all outward good doth but gratify some of our bodily senses.) How much soever they may be esteemed by mankind, yet they serve no higher end than the yielding satisfaction to those appetites which are common with us to brute crea-

tures. There is not a beast of the field but hath the same enjoyments and the same pleasures that any worldly man receives from those sensible things which he busies himself about. For the sum of all his labours and endeavours comes but to this, that he be put into good outward circumstances; that he be in such a condition, that all his senses may be gratified; that he may eat and drink well; that he may have variety of sensual pleasures; and that he may be free from the fears of want, both as to himself and his children. And do not the brutes enjoy themselves as much as such a man in all these respects? have not they all these satisfactions? There is no doubt of it. If there be any question about this, it is, whether they have not these enjoyments in greater perfection than worldly, vicious men have; for the beasts are free from all those anxieties and fears and uncomfortable reflections which oftentimes grate upon the minds of such men, even in the midst of their best and highest animal gratifications. But now these goods that are of a spiritual nature do gratify the intellectual appetites of mankind. They are the proper objects of those powers and faculties whereby mankind are distinguished from brutes: they are such kind of goods as men (as they are men) can only be pleased with.

What is it that we have above brutes, but these two things, the power of reason and the sense of religion? Now how are these two faculties perfected? what are the adequate objects of them? Doth not the perfection of our reason consist in employing our understandings about the best objects, and using our liberty in the best way? Do we not then act most reasonably when we propose to our-

selves the worthiest ends, and steadily pursue those means which lead to those ends, and when we keep all our inferior appetites, common to us with the brutes, under due regulation and government? But what is all this but another name for virtue? And further, What is it that that sense of religion, which nature hath endowed us with above brute creatures, doth put us upon? In what way is that to be exercised? Doth it not consist in performing acts of worship and praise and adoration to the Supreme Being, in acknowledging, in loving, in depending upon him, who gives us whatever we enjoy, and having a constant sense of his presence and power and goodness? So that to employ ourselves in these kinds of things, to study them, to be daily conversant in them, to make them the business of our lives, is the only evidence we can give that we live like men; that we look upon ourselves as placed in a higher rank of beings than the beasts; that we put our rational natures to that use that by their very make and constitution they were designed to be put to. And however it be that the pleasure and satisfaction which arise from these things, viz. virtue and religion, do not make so great a noise, nay, perhaps, may seem very flat and insipid to those who are unacquainted with them; yet I am certain there is none who hath ever made trial of them but is abundantly convinced that they far transcend all the gratifications of sense in the world: that to serve God, and to keep a good conscience, and to govern our passions, and to live soberly and righteously and godly, yields infinitely more peace and pleasure and satisfaction to a man's mind, than the happiest outward condition, the most prosperous successes of our

worldly designs. And indeed, in the reason of the thing, it must be thus: forasmuch as the higher and nobler the faculties are, so much the more exquisitely delightful must be their satisfaction. So many degrees therefore as reason and understanding are above sense, so many degrees proportionably must virtue and goodness, which are their proper objects, exceed all sensible enjoyments.

And thus much of the fifth consideration. The sum of what I have hitherto said comes to this, that if either you will choose a certainty before an uncertainty; or that which is easy to be come by, before that which is difficult; or that which is really and indisputably good, good at all times and in all circumstances, before that which it is doubtful whether it be good or no; or that good which you can call your own, before that which is at the mercy of a thousand accidents every day; or, lastly, that good which is the highest and noblest which our natures are capable of, before that which is mean and low, and which the beasts of the field have as much a share in as mankind: I say, if you will proceed in your choice by any of these measures, then we must certainly prevail upon you to follow St. Paul's advice in the text, you must *set your affection on the things above, and not on the things on the earth.*

But to convince you further of the absolute necessity of so doing; if you have any regard to your own interests, there are two considerations more to be laid before you, which are of greater weight than all that has been hitherto represented; though I can but just name them to you, not having now time left to enlarge upon them.

VI. When the competition lies between two

things, which of them we should afford the uppermost place in our esteem and affection, and the greatest share of our care and pains for the acquisition of them, and it is made apparent to us that the one of them is so absolutely necessary to our happiness in this world, that, if we have it not, we shall necessarily be miserable; but the other doth so little contribute to our happiness, that we may do very well without it, at least we may do very well with such a share of it as we may certainly promise to ourselves, if we do take care to secure the other: I say, in this case, who can avoid the preferring the former, and pitching upon it for our main end, rather than the latter? And yet truly thus stands the case between *the things of the earth* and *the things above*. Spiritual things, viz. virtue and piety, and the like, are such goods, that without them it is impossible for a man to be tolerably happy in this world, let his other circumstances be never so prosperous. Though a man had success in all his temporal designs, even according to his own heart's desire; though he was possessed of every good that this world can afford him; yet such is the frame of human nature, and such likewise is the constitution of things in this world, that for all this the man would not be easy; nay, as to many periods of his life, he would be very miserable, if devoid of virtue and goodness and the fear of God: whereas, on the other side, whoever is possessed of these, whoever is truly good, and makes it his main business to serve and to please God, such a man, for the most part, enjoys as much happiness as the world can give: however, he can never be miserable, let things happen to him as they will. If it please God to be-

stow upon him the common outward comforts and conveniences of life, (as of all others such a man most rarely misses of them, God having promised, that if we first *seek his kingdom and the righteousness thereof, all other things shall be added unto us*, Matt. vi. 33.) why, in this case, the man wants nothing to make him completely happy, as far as this state will allow of. But if he should be destitute even of these common comforts we speak of, and God should think fit to exercise him with many crosses and afflictions, yet even in this case the man would be far from being miserable; he hath that within him which will for ever support him under all trials of this nature. And this is the sum of my sixth consideration, which indeed deserves a just discourse by itself, in order to its being put into a clear light. But,

VII. Lastly, to conclude all. What I have hitherto said has been to shew, that if we aimed at no more than our present well-being in this life, it would be absolutely necessary that we should *set our affections on the things above, and not on the things on the earth*. But there is still a much weightier argument to persuade us to this; and such a one, as if all the rest signified nothing, would have force enough of itself to do it; nay, such force, as no man in his wits can resist: and that, in plain English, is this; If we set our affections on the things of the earth, how much pleasure or advantage soever we may promise to ourselves from them in this world, yet, when we come to die, we shall not be a whit the better for them: nay, so far from that, that we are lost and undone and miserable to eternity, if we have not taken care to secure to our-

selves those spiritual treasures I have been all along speaking of. Whereas, on the contrary, if we *set our affections on the things above*, how slender a provision soever we have made to ourselves of worldly goods, yet by thus pitching our designs, we purchase to ourselves *an everlasting inheritance in the heavens ; a crown of glory that fadeth not away*, 1 Peter v. 4. The perpetual enjoyment of such pleasures and rewards *as no tongue can utter, nor the mind of man conceive of*, 1 Cor. ii. 9.

There need no words to set off this argument. The plain state of the matter is this : God sets before us *the things of this earth, and the things above*. The one, as the apostle tells us, *are temporal*, the other *eternal*, 2 Cor. iv. 18 : the one are for serving the turns of this present life, which is but of a short continuance ; the other last as long as our souls, that is, for ever. The former are indeed present to us, and do more strongly affect those powers in us, which in this corrupt state we are generally led by ; but yet the end of them is everlasting damnation in hell fire, with the Devil and his angels, supposing we have set our hearts upon them to the neglect of the other. The latter are indeed at a distance, and we are not apt to have so vivid a sense of them : but yet, if we set our hearts upon them, if we make the purchase of them our principal care and pursuit, they will not leave us, either in this world or the other, but will secure to us the eternal salvation both of our souls and bodies in the kingdom of heaven. And all this is true, or else all religion is false.

This now being the true state of the case between spiritual things and temporal, between *the*

things of the earth and the things above, let every one, who hath common sense, judge which of them he ought to *set his affections on*, and lay out himself about.

I pray God to give us all grace to act in this our great concernment as reasonable men should. If we do so, happy are we. Happy, no doubt, in a good degree, even while we live in this world, but unspeakably happy when we leave it. For then *an entrance shall be administered unto us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus*, 2 Peter i. 11. where, with all the holy angels of God, and all *the spirits of just men made perfect*, Heb. xii. 23. we shall for ever live in perfect peace and joy, and sing everlasting praises to him who made us, and redeemed us, and hath *done more abundantly for us, than we could ask or think*, Eph. iii. 20.

To whom be all honour and glory, henceforth and for ever.

A SERMON

ON

EPHESIANS IV. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.

WHAT is it that St. Paul here means by *corrupt communication*? Why certainly his design was to caution Christians against all filthiness and immodesty and lasciviousness in their discourses. But though all impure and obscene speeches be more especially a *corrupt conversation*, and what, I believe, was chiefly meant in this text, yet we may, if we please, extend the prohibition so as to take into it all other sorts of speeches that are against good manners, and contrary to the laws of the gospel.

Thus far we do readily grant the prohibition may be extended. But this will not satisfy some persons; for they are for carrying it much further. There are some who do not think it enough that men should abstain from all sorts of speeches or communication that is contrary to good manners, but they think likewise that every Christian is obliged to take care, that all his words, all his conversation with others, should be so ordered as to have something in it that tends to the promoting of religion; something that makes for the spiritual edification of those to whom he speaks. And whatever speeches or dis-

courses are used in conversation, that are not of this nature, they account to be *corrupt communication*. And this they gather from the words of the text; *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.*

And there are two other texts in the New Testament that seem to favour this notion of theirs. One is that passage of our Saviour's where he says, *That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof at the day of judgment*, Matt. xii. 36. Now what is an *idle word*, but such a word as is unprofitable? such a word as doth not minister to edification? The other text is that of St. Paul, where he condemns, not only *all filthiness* in our communication, but also *all foolish talking and jesting*, as things *which are not convenient*, Ephes. v. 4. So that not only idle and unprofitable words, but also all sorts of joking and jesting are forbidden by the apostle. Now we all know what jesting means. It is the speaking things, by way of mirth and drollery, for the entertainment and diversion of the company. So that, according to these people's interpretation of St. Paul, we are never in conversation to speak any thing but what is grave and serious. And every thing that ministers only to mirth and pleasantness, though it be otherwise never so innocent, *is inconvenient*, as the apostle styles it, that is, not to be practised by any Christian.

This is the full of what is objected by the nicest and most scrupulous sort of persons against the common conversation of the world. And I must confess these three texts I have named do, at the

first hearing, appear wonderfully strict and severe, and seem to carry that sense which hath been now represented. And I do believe there are several honest and serious Christians among us, who, taking them in this sense, are uneasy in their own minds, and do daily accuse themselves as offenders, because their talk and discourses do not come up to that strictness which they fancy is enjoined by these passages.

My present design, therefore, is to vindicate the just and innocent liberty which God hath allowed us in the use of our tongues, by giving an account of these three texts, which, as some people expound them, do really invade it.

But withal, I shall take care to enforce the practice of that which the text I am now upon, in the true sense of it, doth recommend to us. And this is the other thing I propose to do in treating on this argument.

I. But before I come to a particular examination of these texts, I must premise these two things.

1. That it is a great presumption against the interpretation of these texts, in that strict sense we have mentioned, that if such an interpretation be admitted it will destroy some of the great uses and advantages of speech among mankind. For the benefit of speech was given us, not only to help and forward one another in the way that leads to eternal life, (which must indeed be confessed is the great end of all,) but it was given us also for the helping and forwarding one another in all the businesses which are of a secular concernment. Our speech was given us for the same purposes that all other worldly blessings and talents and endowments

are, viz. not only for the business of religion, but also for the serving all the other designs we have in the world that tend to the making our own lives, or the lives of others, easy and convenient and comfortable; as, for instance, for the maintaining of commerce and correspondence one with another in matters of trade; for the managing all our civil concerns to the best advantage; for the endearing ourselves to one another by mutual friendship and acquaintance, and the payment of mutual respects and civilities; and, in pursuance of this, for the diverting our friends and acquaintance, and the making each other's condition as pleasant and agreeable as we may. And, in truth, I account that cheerful and diverting talk (provided it be innocent) is as necessary to keep both ourselves and those we converse with in health and good humour, and in a fitness to perform all the duties of human life, whether they respect God or our neighbour, as any other exercise or recreation in the world; and if this liberty of talking pleasantly (though not always to edification) be denied to mankind, and all men thought so, and practised accordingly, the world in a little time, instead of being a place of human society, would be turned into a den of mopes and hypochondriacs. This is the first presumption against the strict way of interpreting these texts.

2. But there is another thing that doth as much make against it, viz. that really, according to these interpretations, the texts are not practicable. Devout people may fancy what they please about all our speeches tending to edification; but in truth it is all speculation. I never yet knew or heard of any persons (who were not under the disorders of hypo-

chondriac melancholy) so grave or serious or severe in their conversation, but upon occasion have allowed themselves the liberty of talking an hundred things which would not comport with the strictness of this rule. So that even the devoutest of men should not interpret these texts of scripture to the sense before mentioned, and should not make this interpretation the rule of their words and discourses. They must, I doubt, every night go to rest with a troubled and uneasy conscience for the communication they have had that day, as necessarily believing that they have that day offended God in their discourses. There is indeed the example of our Lord Jesus urged against this; of whom we read in scripture that he several times wept; but it is not recorded there that he ever laughed. But if you will well attend to it, there is no great force in this. Doth it therefore follow, that because no mention is made of our Saviour's laughing, that therefore he never laughed? We may, by the same logic, conclude, that he never went to bed, because we find no mention of it in the holy scriptures. But in truth, from the character that is given of our Saviour in scripture, one would rather believe the contrary to this was true, and that he was not so sullen and morose a person as this objection would represent him; but rather that he was a man of great benignity and pleasantness and sociableness in his conversation: witness his frequent vouchsafing his presence at feasts and entertainments; insomuch, as he himself tells us, that whereas John the Baptist was accused to *have a devil*, (that is, to be a disturbed hypochondriac,) upon account of his reservedness, he, our Saviour, went under the character of a *glutton* or a *wine-*

bibber, Matt. xi. 18, 19. upon account of the freedom of his conversation.

Having premised these two things, I now come to consider the texts themselves; and I shall give an account of them one by one.

First, And I begin with that of our Saviour's in Matt. xii. 36. *I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.* The difficulty here is to know what our Lord means by *idle words*. We commonly think, as I said, every unprofitable word that doth not tend to some serious purpose is an *idle word*. But I believe, upon examination, it will be found, that the ἀργὸν ῥῆμα, *the idle word* here spoken of, hath a quite different sense. The true way to know our Saviour's meaning is to look back to what goes before, to attend to the occasion upon which he spoke these words, and the scope and design he had in speaking of them. Now it is plain that our Saviour is here treating about that which we commonly call the sin against the Holy Ghost. The Pharisees had said, *This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of devils*, ver. 24. Our Saviour takes notice of this saying of theirs, and first of all, by clear arguments and demonstrations, shews, that this was a mere calumny, a mere slander of theirs; and that it was impossible, all things considered, that he should cast out devils, and do his other miracles, by any other power than the Spirit of God. And this is the effect of all his discourse in the next six verses, viz. from the 24th to the 31st. He then comes, in the second place, to declare against the greatness and danger of the sin they were guilty of, in thus maliciously tra-

ducing his miracles, and saying that he did them by the power of the Devil: and this he doth in the two next verses; *I say unto you, That all manner of sin and blasphemy* (viz. all manner of calumny and slander) *shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy* (the calumny and slander) *against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men*, ver. 31. Further; *Whosoever*, says he, *speaketh a word against the Son of man*, (that is, against Jesus Christ, as to his personal qualifications, as, for instance, calling him a glutton or a wine-bibber,) *it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost*, (viz. whosoever blasphemes the miracles that I do by the power of the holy Spirit of God, and attributes them to the Devil, this blasphemy and calumny is of so high a nature, that) *it shall never be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the other*, ver. 32. After this, he goes on in the three next verses further to vindicate his miracles from those aspersions, and to declare against their horrible hypocrisy in thus slandering them: and then in the next verse come in these words I am now speaking of; *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment*. Thus come in the words, upon this occasion, and in pursuance of the former discourse. I will now appeal to any one, who knows any thing of the laws of discourse, whether it be not plain, that our Saviour, in this expression of his, of giving account at the day of judgment for *idle words*, hath not reference to such kind of words as he had all this while been talking of, viz. such words as the Pharisees spoke, when they said that *he cast out devils by Beelzebub the prince of*

devils. Certainly this is as evident from the connexion of one part of our Saviour's discourse with the rest, as any thing can be. And if we will not make our Saviour to speak inconsistently, and to talk against the rules of talking, we must acknowledge that the words which he here calls *idle words* must be such false, malicious, slanderous words, as he hath all this time been reproving the Pharisees for.

Well; but it will be said that this account of the text doth indeed suit very well with the occasion and with the context; but yet it seems not to suit with the terms here used. Our Saviour doth not say, that for every slander or calumny that men shall speak they shall give account, but for *every idle word they shall speak*. To this I answer, that if the sense of *idle words*, in the language that our Saviour spoke, must necessarily have been the same with the sense of *idle words* in our language, this would be a considerable objection. But it is plain it is not so. *Idle words*, in the Jewish language, do often import a great deal more than useless and unprofitable words, viz. *false and lying words*. To give a few instances of this: we are forbid, in the third commandment, *to take the name of God idly or in vain*, Exod. xx. 7. (for it is indifferent which of these ways we render the Hebrew word.) But now the sense of that (as our Saviour himself expounds it) is, *Thou shalt not take God's name into thy mouth falsely, Thou shalt not forswear thyself*, Matt. v. 33. And thus in the book of Proverbs *idle words* are made to be the same thing with *lying words*. And thus likewise in the Epistle to the Ephesians, chap. v. ver. 6. *Let no man deceive you with vain or idle words*. The plain sense is, *Let no man deceive you with false or*

lying words. And thus in the Old Testament, where the gods of the heathens are called *vain or idle gods*, the sense is, that they are *false gods*. So that in the very nature of the expression, a great deal more may be imported in the term of *idle words*, than barely useless, unprofitable, unedifying words. And where the scope and design of the discourse carries it to more, (as it doth plainly here,) more undoubtedly is to be understood by that term. The sum of this point is this, the *idle words* which we shall give account for are *false and slanderous words*; or, if you will, any sort of words which savour of a corrupt communication, any words that violate the laws of morality; but by no means such words as are innocent, and in which no harm is meant, and by which no harm is done; though perhaps they do not serve to any great purpose either of spiritual or temporal improvement or advantage. And thus much let it suffice to have spoken of the first text.

Secondly, The next I will give an account of is that of St. Paul, Eph. v. 4. He, in the verse before, having exhorted the Ephesians, *that fornication and all uncleanness might not so much as be named among them, as becometh saints*, adds in this verse, *neither filthiness, nor foolish talking or jesting*. Here now seems to be a terrible check and rebuke given to all that we call mirth, or wit, or raillery, or good humour in conversation; for all that comes under the notion of jesting, as we use the word. So that if jesting is forbidden, God forgive most of the conversation of this world, though otherwise never so innocent. But I think I need say no more to convince you that this is not the true meaning of the text, than only to give you Dr. Hammond's ac-

count of it, who was indeed himself one of the gravest, severest men that perhaps his age bred. He takes notice that *μωρολογία* and *εὐτραπελία* (which are the words here used, and which we render *foolish talking or jesting*) are in this place so joined together, that the latter word is only an explanation of the former. For the apostle, speaking of several other things that are not to be named among Christians, mentions, among the rest, foolish talking or jesting. He doth not say foolish talking *and* jesting, which would make them two distinct things; but foolish talking *or* jesting, which makes the latter word only an explication of that which goes before. He observes likewise further, that *μωρολογία*, which we render *foolish talking*, (but if strictly interpreted would signify *speaking folly*,) is, in the language of scripture, such kind of talking as tends to lewdness and uncleanness; as to commit folly in the sacred language is the same thing as to commit fornication or adultery. And consequently the latter word, *jesting*, means the same thing, only with this difference, that *μωρολογία* is speaking lewdly in general, but *εὐτραπελία*, or *jesting*, is speaking lewdly, by way of jest, with a design to *move laughter*, for that is the importance of the word. He therefore concludes, that both these words, *foolish talking* and *jesting*, are not to be taken in the full latitude that they signify in our language, but are to be confined to such kind of talk or discourse as is impure and smutty and obscene. And this conclusion of his he confirms from two things: first, from the company that these are set with, viz. uncleanness, fornication, inordinate lust, (which is more proper than covetousness, *πλεονεξία*: vid. Hammond's note on Rom. i. 29.) and filthiness,

which are named immediately before. And secondly, and more especially, from the reason that is given why these things should *not be named among Christians* in the words following ; and that is this : *For this you know*, says the apostle, ver. 5, *that no whoremonger, or unclean person, or inordinate luster*, (πλεονεκτῆς,) *who is an idolater*, (for so the words are more intelligibly rendered than by *covetous man, who is an idolater*,) *hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*. Here is a reason given why none of those things before mentioned *should be named among Christians*. It follows therefore, that *foolish talking and jesting*, which are one of the things mentioned, must be of the same sort with the rest of the things, viz. must fall under some head of uncleanness, otherwise the reason here given would not reach them, and consequently would not answer to the exhortation. I think this is a very plain account of this passage, and that there needs no more to be said about it.

Thirdly; Well, but the difficulty about the liberty of speech is not yet over. However we get off from this text, yet what can be said to the other passage of St. Paul, which I have at present made my text? The apostle, in this place, doth not only caution us that *no corrupt communication should proceed out of our mouths*, but he also exhorts that we should in all our conversation *speak that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers*.

What is meant by this? Is it not plain from hence that no words ought to pass our lips but such as tend to edification, such as minister grace to

the hearers? Well, this text I shall now, in the last place, consider.

1st. And first of all I desire it may be taken notice of, that let the sense of these words be what it will, yet they are always to be understood with this proviso, viz. supposing we have ability and convenience and opportunity. A man cannot always speak that which tends *to the use of edifying*. For in many cases perhaps it is above his reach. But if he could, oftentimes the nature of the conversation, or the circumstances of the company, would not bear it. In either of these cases now I hope a man doth not transgress the apostle's rule, when he doth not speak such things *as minister grace to the hearers*, whatsoever be the meaning of that phrase. It is plain that the apostle doth not require of us that our speeches should always be for edification, and that they should always minister grace unto the hearers; for there is no such word as *always* in the text: and indeed the thing itself is impossible, and therefore certainly he doth not always condemn us when our speeches are not so. But this is that which he exhorts us to, as we have ability, and as we have opportunity put into our hands, that we should make use of them for the purposes of edifying our brethren, that our discourse *may minister grace to the hearers*. Our communication is lawful and allowable, though it do not minister to edification, provided it be innocent. But it is then praiseworthy, and suitable to the excellency of that religion we have taken upon us, when we make it useful and edifying to others. And this we ought to do as often as we can. This, I take it, is the general sense of the apostle's words.

2dly. But, secondly, let us a little more particularly consider this text. And here two things are to be inquired into,

First, what is here meant by the phrase *to the use of edifying*; secondly, what is meant by the phrase of *ministering grace to the hearers*.

(1.) As to the first, the answer is short, viz. that when the apostle exhorts that our *communication should be such as is good, to the use of edifying*, that phrase imports no more than this, that which *is good to the use of instruction*, οἰκοδομὴν τῆς χρείας, or that which *is good to the instruction of use*; for both these ways the words may be rendered: that is to say, (as most expositors explain it,) “Let your
“speech be such as tends to that useful instruction
“that every body you converse with have need of
“or occasion for.” Or thus, Let your speech be pertinent, and someways fitting the needs and exigencies of those you have to deal with. This, I think, is the full sense of the former phrase.

(2.) And then, in the second place, as for the latter, viz. *that it may minister grace to the hearers*, Grotius’s note here is, “that you may deserve well
“of your hearers, by being useful to them.” Dr. Hammond’s note is, “that your speech may bring
“advantage to them who hear you.” So that in truth all that is meant and enjoined by this text comes to this, (I give it you in the words of another excellent expositor of holy scripture, viz. Vorstius,) “Let no corrupt or vicious communication proceed
“out of your mouth, but that which is useful and
“pertinent, as there is occasion; that so not only
“your speech may be acceptable to, and well received by them who hear it, but may also, some

“ way or other, profit them, and be of advantage to them.”

This, I verily believe, is both the true and the full sense and importance of these words. It is not here said that our speech ought always to be serious, much less that it ought always to be about matters of religion, or always to tend to spiritual edification; but that it always ought to be pertinent and proper to the present occasion: and, as far as the occasion will bear, it should be useful and instructive to those who hear it, so as that they may receive some benefit, some advantage from our discourses, more or less, according as our own talents and abilities, or the circumstances of the company, or the nature of the business before us do give us opportunity.

And if so, I appeal to any one, whether the most scrupulous person have any just reason from this text to be afraid of any harmless mirth and pleasantness and freedom in conversation; or to think himself, upon account thereof, obliged to talk nothing but what is grave and serious.

And thus I have vindicated the innocent liberties of common conversation from the objections which some devout but melancholy persons are apt to make against them.

II. But I must not leave the matter thus. The exhortation in my text is of too great moment to be slightly passed over; and therefore I shall proceed now, by way of application, to enforce the practice of that which the text, in the true sense of it, recommends to us: *Let no corrupt communication, says St. Paul, proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.*

Now to the observing this rule, it is supposed, not only that we have laid aside all vicious and corrupt communication, that we have got over the common faults of mankind in their discourses, viz. that we never talk unlawful, forbidden things, and that none of our conversation is either against truth, or charity, or piety, or purity, which is the corrupt communication that is prohibited by the laws of Christ. But, I say, if we would observe this rule, it is supposed further, that we make it one of the great businesses of our conversation to do all the good we can; to help, and profit, and be useful to all we converse with in all the ways which are in our power. Now there is no man living, who is not a natural or a lunatic, but is some way or other capable of practising this rule in his conversation; at least at some times. He is an odd sort of man, whatever his education, or profession, or circumstances be, who cannot sometimes do service by his communication to those he converseth with; (though otherwise much wiser than himself;) either by teaching them something which he knows better than they, or informing them in something which it concerns them to know, and yet they cannot come to the knowledge of it without that information. But as for those upon whom God hath bestowed any considerable degree of parts and talents, and especially where those parts have been improved by education or experience; they ought to remember that God hath bestowed these blessings upon them, not for their own sakes only, but that they might be instruments of doing good to mankind by their communication. It is in their power, if they will, to make the most common discourses they are engaged

in, some way or other useful and beneficial to the hearers: and certainly, if all such persons would once try this way of conversation, viz. to talk as usefully as they can to the company they are engaged in, (in what way soever it be,) they would soon find the comfort of it.

There is no doubt but that every night, when they come on their pillows to reflect on the actions of the day past, (as I believe men generally do not sleep so soundly, but, whether they will or no, they make some reflections,) they would find a great deal of pleasure in being able to satisfy themselves that that day hath not been spent unprofitably. Though they have been engaged in several sorts of conversation, yet they have endeavoured that their talk should not have been altogether useless and impertinent. They have, some way or other, bettered the company, either by their notions or instructions, or by their advices and cautions. This that I now say hath reference to all sorts of useful talk wherein the life of men is concerned, whether it be in matters of trade or arts or sciences, or with respect to men's manners, or their civil and domestic concernments.

But there is one sort of useful talk which, I think, I ought to press a little more particularly upon this occasion, and that is, in the points of piety and religion; which I believe my text hath a particular respect to, though it ought not to be confined to them. St. Paul says, that *all our communication should be good to the use of edifying*. I do not gather from hence that all our discourse ought to be about spiritual matters, or otherwise it is a corrupt communication, for this is the thing I have been all this while confuting: but this is that which I say, Cer-

tainly spiritual things ought not to be wholly passed by in our common conversation. On the contrary, we ought to take all occasions to speak of them, this being the best and the noblest theme that we can employ our speech about, and that which most tends to the benefit of others.

Pray hear what our apostle saith in another place: *Let the word of Christ, says he, dwell in you richly; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord, Coloss. iii.*

16. These words import, that as we should always have a deep sense of religion in our hearts, so we should be endeavouring to impress it upon others: that we should not only be fully possessed ourselves with an entire esteem and love of the gospel of Christ, and a thankful heart to God for all his benefits, but that we should make it our business to infuse the same spirit of devotion into the minds of all we converse with.

O what a world of good might we do, if we would but thus manage our conversation among men! It is not my meaning here to encourage any one in a religious cant, or in a course of using scripture expressions in their common discourses, or to advise any one to be always talking about spiritual matters, whether seasonably or unseasonably. But this I say, it would become us all, in our several stations, to do as much good as we can: and therefore, wherever occasion offers itself, if we can pertinently cast in any thing in our discourse that either tends to the impressing on our company a sense of God, or to the confirming them in a belief of Christianity, or to the amending any defect we see in them, or to

the arousing them to a more hearty, lively exercise of devotion, we should do extremely well to take the opportunity.

This I am confident of, that if the devout and serious men among us, they who have a hearty sense of religion, (though the number of them be but small in comparison of the rest of mankind,) would but make it their business, in all their conversation, heartily to stand up for the interests of God and virtue, as opportunity fairly leads them to it, by discouraging vice and immorality and infidelity wherever they may decently do it; and by taking all occasions of recommending the practice of holiness and virtue, we should, in a little time, see a much better world; nor would atheism, profaneness, and irreligion be able to bear up and support itself against the irresistible evidence of truth.

But, alas! we think not much of these things. It is enough for us that we say our prayers in our closets, and have an inward reverence for God and religion; but as for the concerning ourselves about it in our conversation, there we are to be excused. We do very well, and as much as we can hope for, if we can avoid the vices and irregularities of discourse; but to talk of promoting piety, that doth not belong to us. But why should piety be banished all our discourse? Why should we not take occasion to mingle something of that in our common conversation, as well as those many impertinent things that come into our heads? Are not the arguments of religion; are not the being of a God and his providence, and the truth and excellence of Christ's religion; are not the unexceptionable reasonableness of virtue and holiness, and the infinite,

eternal rewards we may attain to thereby; I say, are not these things of as great concernment to us as the fashion of our apparel, or a new play, or a story of an amour, or how such a person managed in such an affair, or how things go at court, or what account the foreign letters give of the transactions abroad; I say, are not the former things a thousand times of more concernment to us than these? Nay, and are they not more proper, and every way more fit for us to talk of? Nay, I will add further, are they not more delightful and entertaining to any well-disposed person than the other? There is not the least doubt of it. All that is to be said is, that there is custom for the one, but not for the other. But why should evil and unreasonable customs be kept up, especially when so much good would accrue to mankind from the breaking of them? I declare all this time I am not for a preaching, canting conversation. I would have no one break the rules of common decency for the sake of talking religiously out of season. The thing I recommend is to be managed with prudence; and chiefly I propose it in such conversations where there is an entire friendship and intimacy. Here, I say, especially lies our opportunity of doing much good to one another by our discourses. Here we may, without the imputation of singularity or affectation, mingle most serious, savoury things with our common talk: here we have opportunity of instructing one another in matters of salvation; of reproving one another for our faults; of exhorting one another to a serious regard to our eternal interests; of exciting one another to grow more and more in all goodness and virtue: here we may, without ill manners, warm

one another's hearts, by recounting God's innumerable favours to us, by setting forth his praise, and declaring his most wonderful works, and comforting one another with the promises he hath given us in being our God, and making us heirs of eternal life.

And this let me say further, for the encouragement of all pious persons in this religious communication, viz. that they can seldom use any of this discourse in good earnest, but it will have some good effect. Though their friends, to whom it is spoken, do not seem at present to be much wrought upon by it, yet it is not wholly lost upon them. They think of it afterwards, and, in all probability, it proves either a step to their conversion, or at least a check to their further proceeding in wickedness. I doubt not but all religious talk, if it be warm, and withal prudent, is as much catching, and doth as much execution towards the making men good, as the corrupt and profligate conversation of the world doth towards the making them bad: and yet of the efficacy and mischief of that we all are sufficiently sensible, and have too great reason to complain.

A SERMON

ON

JAMES I. 13.

*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God :
for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he
any man.*

THAT which I design to treat upon from this text is this ; how far God is concerned in the temptations to sin which happen to mankind. To which I shall, without any further preface, apply myself, and have four things to offer, or four propositions to lay down about this point, which will take in all that is needful for the explaining the doctrine of St. James in my text, of *God's tempting no man*, and reconciling it with other scriptures, where it is said that *God doth tempt men* ; and also afford us useful matter for practical application.

I. The first proposition I lay down about God tempting men is this :

If we take temptation for the making of a trial of men's inward qualities and dispositions, (as the word is sometimes taken in that latitude,) then it is very certain that God doth tempt men. For he often so dispenseth his providence towards them, and puts them into those circumstances, rather than others, on purpose to prove the frame and temper of their minds, how they stand to him. What I now say is perfectly the language of scripture as to this matter. There we meet with two sorts of temptations,

wherewith God is said to tempt his servants; the one by words, the other by deeds. Of the former kind we have but one instance, but it is a remarkable one; and that is, God's tempting of Abraham by laying a command upon him to offer up his only son in sacrifice to him. Thus Gen. xxii. 1. *And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, saying, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains that I shall shew thee.* Now what end this temptation was for (or at least one of the ends) appears by the 12th verse, where, after Abraham had put all things in readiness towards the fulfilling of God's command, he tells him, *Now I know, says he, that thou fearest God, since thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.* Here was a strange trial of Abraham's obedience; he is commanded by God to do that which God himself had no mind should be done, as the event shewed. But this was an instance of God's temptation, which stands alone by itself, and there is nothing like it in the whole scripture: and it may be questioned whether any man in the world, besides Abraham, was ever thus tempted.

And as for the other way of tempting men, viz. by his dealings with them, or by the dispensations of his providence towards them, there are abundance of instances to be given of it in scripture. Thus Moses tells the children of Israel, that all his dealings with them in the wilderness for forty years was *for the tempting of them, to know what was in their hearts, and whether they would keep his commandments, or no,* Deut. viii. 2. And in Exodus, when

the people were in a great consternation at the thundering and lightnings, and other manifestations of God's presence, which they had heard and seen in the mount, Moses saith unto them, *Fear not: for God is come to tempt you, and that his fear may be before your face, that ye sin not*, Exodus xx. 20. And, lastly, to name no more texts, when Moses had told the people of the arising of false prophets among them, that would endeavour to seduce them to idolatry, by the means of the great signs and wonders that they would work for the confirmation of their wicked doctrines; yet for all that, saith he, *Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of those prophets: for the Lord your God doth hereby tempt you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul*, Deut. xiii. 3.

In some of these texts our English translation reads *proving* instead of *tempting*; but the original word is the same in all; and it is the word which, when it is referred to other persons besides God, is always rendered *tempting*. It is certain then, that God in his providence doth frequently tempt men; that is to say, puts them into this or the other condition, or suffers this or the other event to fall upon them, for the trying of their virtue, for the proving their fidelity, and patience, and courage, and constancy, and the like.

And this it is fit we should all seriously reflect upon, and apply to ourselves, especially when any unusual, extraordinary event of divine providence, whether good or bad, is dispensed to us. For even the happy, prosperous circumstances of our lives (as we account them) may be many times ordered in

the way of temptation to us, that is, for the trial of our virtue and adherence to God. But the bad are certainly temptations, and accordingly have that name in the scriptures. Thus in the second verse of that very chapter where my text is, *Count it all joy*, says the apostle, *when ye fall into divers temptations, viz. afflictions; knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience*. And again, 1 Peter i. 6, 7. *Ye are now in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith may be found to praise and honour and glory in the day when Jesus Christ shall be revealed*.

This is the scripture account of these matters. But here a question may arise. You say that God, in these dispensations of his providence, makes trial or experiment whether men be good or bad. But to what purpose is this? God knows that beforehand. He knows certainly, not only what every man can do, but what every man will do, when he is placed in such and such circumstances. And therefore to talk of trying or proving men's virtue by these methods seems a needless thing.

To this I answer, that it is true God knows so well what is in man, that he needs not make any experiment upon him for the satisfying himself about his behaviour in any contingency. And therefore it is certain that these trials, proofs, or experiments (as the scripture calls them) are not made for the satisfying God, but for other wise and virtuous and good ends. And though the phrase in scripture be such as seems to intimate that God sends these temptations, that he may know whether they who are exercised by them do bear an honest mind towards him, yet undoubtedly this is said *ἀνθρωποπάθως*, as

the divines speak ; that is to say, these are forms of speech borrowed from our dealings one with another ; as God is said *to go down and inquire whether the wickedness of Sodom was really so great as the cry thereof*, Gen. xviii. 21. And abundance of such idioms we have in scripture. Indeed, I may say, that almost the whole language of the Old Testament, with relation to God, is of that kind. But the true sense and importance of these passages is no more than this ; that these kind of dispensations of God's providence to men are great exercises of their virtue, and great proofs whereby they may evidence, both to themselves and those about them, that they are what they pretend to be ; and, lastly, great occasions of benefits and advantages both to themselves and others. They are indeed truly and properly trials and experiments, because a man is truly and properly experimented by them. But then the end of this is not to instruct God, or to make him certain of that which he was uncertain of before ; but partly to instruct men what they are to think of themselves, and what others are to think of them ; (which, without these trials, they would not have been able to do ;) and partly to bring a great deal of good to the world, and to those persons in particular who are exercised by these trials.

Two inferences, by way of application, I desire to draw from what has been said upon this point before I go any further.

First, let us from hence be instructed never to judge of God's love or hatred to persons by the outward circumstances that do befall them. Do not conclude, because thou art more fortunate in this world than thy neighbour ; because thou art, by

strange uncommon accidents, advanced, as to thy outward condition ; because thou art blessed in thy basket and in thy store, in thy family and in thy relations, above thine own expectations, or the ordinary successes of other men's endeavours ; I say, do not conclude from hence, that therefore thou art a greater favourite of God's than they who have not sped so well. O this is a very false way of arguing ! God might have a great many other ends to serve by these dispensations of his providence towards thee, different from those thou dreamest of. And perhaps this was one : he meant that these happy circumstances (as thou accountest them) should be sent unto thee by way of temptation ; that they should be trials and experiments of thy virtue ; and according as thou didst use them, or behave thyself under them, so should they prove a blessing or a curse to thee. If thou bearest thyself with an even and composed mind, and makest use of those advantages thou hast above other men for the doing more good in the world than other men, and in the midst of thy prosperity neither vainly pleasest thyself nor despisest others, but walkest reverently and humbly with thy God in all thy conversation ; then thou hast some reason to conclude that these things are really a blessing to thee, for thou acquittest thyself under these trials as thou shouldest do ; and there is no doubt but thy virtue will be approved by God, as well as commended by men ; and thy splendid circumstances will never so rise up in judgment against thee another day, as to occasion that heavy sentence that was passed upon the rich man in the Gospel, (which, in truth, should make every rich or great man to tremble when he thinks of it,)

Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented, Luke xvi. 25.

But, on the other side, if thy prosperity tempt thee to pride and insolence, to the forgetfulness of God and the contempt of men; if thou usest the advantage of thy power to oppress the weak, and of thy wit to overreach the simple, and of thy wealth to minister to the purposes of vice and luxury, *to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*; then thy great successes, by which thou measurest God's love to thee, are not a blessing, (however they were intended,) but a curse. God hath thought fit to try thee in those soft and pleasing ways, and thy virtue hath not been strong enough to abide the trial; but thou art found reprobate.

Again, do not conclude, because God suffers thee to fall into many difficulties and afflictions; because thou art pressed with hard and pinching circumstances; because thou art visited with sad and grievous losses, or with long and painful sickness, or with the death or miscarriage of thy nearest relations, or the like heavy misfortunes; do not, I say, conclude from hence that God is angry with thee, or that he hath no kindness for thee: no; these are no greater marks of God's displeasure than the other instances I before mentioned were of his favour: the best of his children he thinks fit to exercise in this way. And though these chastisements may sometimes truly enough be said to have the nature of punishments and corrections for something that is amiss in us, yet it is certain they are trials also, experiments which he makes of us, whether we so heartily cleave

to him with our whole souls as we pretend to do, and as we ought to do. And therefore,

Which is the second inference I draw from this Discourse, we ought not only not to repine when such temptations as these are cast in our way, but to rejoice under them, and be thankful for them : *Count it all joy*, says the apostle, *when ye fall into divers temptations*, James i. 2 ; for assuredly there is no harm meant to thee, or any body else, by these severe usages, but, on the contrary, a great deal of good. For God, as St. Paul tells us, Heb. xii. 10. *deals not with us as the fathers of our flesh often do, who chasten us for their own pleasure ; but he doth it for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.* God takes no pleasure in seeing thee or any of his creatures uneasy, or in hard and difficult circumstances ; for it is not in his nature willingly to grieve and afflict the children of men. But thy good, and the world's good, require that thou shouldest be thus exercised. A great many excellent ends, both for thy benefit and the benefit of others, were intended by these dispensations of Providence to thee, which I have not now time to dilate upon. Thou wast not, perchance, so careful and diligent about thy duty as thou shouldest have been, and therefore it was fit that thou shouldest, by some sharp affliction, be awakened and aroused to a sense of it. Thy heart and affections, it is like, were too much engrossed by those earthly goods thou didst enjoy ; and therefore, in kindness to thee, God took them away, that thou mightest be brought to a more entire dependance on him, and a closer walking with him : there was this or the other lust remained unmortified in thee, which occasioned thy

making many false steps in the way of God's commandments. But by the chastisements which are sent unto thee (which are generally so proportioned to our faults, that they may be said to bear the characters or signatures of them) thou mayest be taught to walk more evenly and circumspectly. And this lesson David tells us he learned nowhere so well as in the school of afflictions; *Till I was afflicted*, says he, *I went wrong: but now have I kept thy word*, Ps. cxix. 67.

But admit there was no great matter amiss in thy heart or in thy conversation, so that thy sufferings have not properly the notion of chastisements or corrections, (but, O God! where is the man that lives so innocently as to be able to think so of himself?) but admit that thou didst live without blame, yet is it any harm to thee that thou hast opportunities put into thy hands of improving thy virtues and good qualities? Is it not for thy advantage that God will not suffer thee to content thyself with the ordinary attainments of common Christians, but trains thee up in such a discipline, as thou must be necessarily put upon a constant exercise of all thy virtues, especially the more noble ones, of patience and fortitude, and contempt of the world, and absolute resignation to God; that by this means thou mightest make a greater proficiency than ordinary in all divine graces; that by this means the trial of thy faith might be found honourable and glorious; and, lastly, that by this means thou mightest be made conformable to the example of thy Saviour, who was made *perfect by sufferings*. And who knows, likewise, but God may exercise thee thus for the sake of other men? Examples of those virtues

which are chiefly seen and expressed in afflicted circumstances, as they are most naked to the world, so, wherever they are given, they seem to be most instructive and most effectual for the working upon those who are spectators of them. God therefore, by putting thee to combat with more than ordinary difficulties, it is likely meant and designed thee for a public benefit: he hath brought thee, as it were, upon a stage, that others may behold thy carriage and behaviour under thy afflictions, and take pattern from thee how they are to behave themselves when they are tempted, and to instruct them what degrees of virtue are in this life to be attained, and should by good men be aspired after. And sure, in all this, there is no unkindness meant thee, but a great and signal favour; for by these trials thou comest to know thyself, which, without them, thou couldest not have done. Thou hast now some experience of the reality of those pretensions thou makest to piety and virtue. Thou canst now, with a great deal of satisfaction, evidence to thyself that thou art in deed and in truth what thou didst profess, a follower of Christ Jesus in all the ways that he went before thee. And therefore, since thy faith and virtue did not fail thee in the day of temptation, what hast thou to do, but to reflect upon thine own condition with a great deal of pleasure and joy. How much ease and peace will this very consideration bring to thy mind! Thou hast been tempted, and thou art found faithful. No happiness, no enjoyment in this world, can yield a thousandth part of that pleasure and comfort that this very reflection will afford to thee.

Which will be further heightened when thou con-

siderest that all the temptations of this kind that it shall please God to try thee with, do not only serve to confirm thy present hope of happiness, but shall extremely tend to the increase of thy rewards, when the righteous Judge of the world shall come to make retribution to mankind for what they have done in the flesh. At that day shalt thou bless God most heartily for every thing that hath come cross to thee, or wherein thou hast been tempted; *For these short afflictions*, as the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. iv. 10. *which are but for a moment, will work for thee a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* This is, in some measure, true of all afflictions and sufferings of God's sending, that are patiently and christianly borne. But if the sufferings that God calls thee out unto be for the sake of virtue and a good conscience, or for the name of Jesus Christ, then we may use our Saviour's words in the sixth of St. Luke, *Rejoice, O Christian, in that day, and even leap for joy: for exceeding great shall thy reward be in heaven: for in this manner it was done unto the prophets*; and in this manner likewise it was done to thy Lord and Master, and to his apostles, and to the most glorious of his saints in all ages.

II. The second thing I desire to be considered about this business is this; that though it be allowed that God may be said to tempt men, taking temptation for a mere trial of men's virtue and sincerity, yet if we will take the word in the sense that it is commonly used in, viz. for an active solicitation to that which is evil, in this sense we say it is not in the nature of God to tempt any of his creatures. And this is the proper meaning of my text, *Let no*

man say when he is tempted, that he is tempted of God: for God tempteth no man; that is to say, God is not the cause that any man falls into sin by temptation; neither doth he put any man into such circumstances, that he must necessarily and unavoidably be a transgressor of God's laws in them: neither, thirdly, doth he, in any condition of life, actually solicit or entice a man from his duty: neither, in the fourth place, let a man be under what temptations he will, doth God ever incline or excite his heart to close with them, or create or stir up any corruptions in him to take fire from them. In none of these senses doth God tempt any man; for he is of purer eyes than to behold or approve any iniquity of any kind, in any person whatsoever; and therefore certainly he will have no hand in the producing of it. And that is the meaning of the reason which the apostle gives why God tempteth no man: God, says he, cannot be tempted with evil, and he tempteth no man; viz. God, who cannot by any means be drawn to iniquity himself, will certainly never draw others to it. His nature is infinite holiness and purity; and there is nothing in the world so contrary to it as vice and sin: and therefore we cannot imagine that he will any way be the author or abettor or promoter of that which he most hates; the tempter to that which of all things in the world is most displeasing to him; nay, which of all things in the world he hath only an aversion to. Nay, further; so far is God from tempting to sin in any of the senses I have now mentioned, that he is always ready to assist us in all the temptations which do assault us, that we be not overcome by them. This is the

III. Third proposition I lay down in this matter.

A thousand temptations doth he really prevent, which would otherwise come upon us, scattering the snares of our malicious adversary, and counter-working his stratagems: and whatever temptations he doth suffer us to fall into, yet, if we beg his help and protection, he will not fail to give us such strength as we shall be able to vanquish them.

If the circumstances of our lives were left to our own conduct, the Devil, whose business it is in the world to seduce mankind, would soon make a prey of us; nor would there be any possibility of avoiding his nets. But the same God, who hath set bounds to the floods of the sea, hath also set bounds to the incursions of our enemy, saying, *Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further.* And even in those cases where he doth suffer the tempter to spread his nets, yet, by that merciful Providence which watches over mankind, his designs are so defeated, that oftentimes he hath not that success which he desires or expects, even upon those that are not so very good, or so careful of their own ways as they should be. Even as to these, the restraining grace of God is often so powerful, or he so interposes by unforeseen providences, as to preserve them from such grievous falls and mischiefs, as, had they been left to their own virtue and counsel, they could not have prevented.

But then, as for those who have the fear of God before their eyes, and do sincerely endeavour, in all their actions, to approve themselves to him, these persons are under so particular a care and protection of God, that whatever temptations God thinks fit to exercise them with, they shall be supported

under them, and endowed with sufficient strength to overcome them. For our Lord Jesus Christ, *who was in all things tempted like unto us*, (as the apostle tells us, Heb. iv. 15.) *is abundantly both able and willing to succour us when we are tempted*, chap. ii. 18. And though he do not sometimes upon our prayers remove the temptation from us so soon as we may desire, yet that which comforted St. Paul in this case ought to satisfy us also, viz. that *his grace is sufficient for us*, 2 Cor. xii. 9.

IV. My fourth and last proposition is, God doth not only not tempt us to sin, and assist us likewise against the temptations of sin, but (which deserves to be especially considered in this argument) he is always, on the contrary, tempting us from sin, if we may so use that word, which is commonly taken in a bad sense. The Devil is not more ready to infuse bad thoughts into our hearts than the holy Spirit of God is to inspire us with those that are good; the Devil is not more diligent to make use of every object, every occasion that presents itself to us, for the soliciting us from our duty, than the holy Spirit of God is to take every opportunity of darting his holy motions into our minds, and thereby exciting us and persuading us to virtue and obedience. As we are encompassed by a multitude of evil angels, that labour to circumvent us; so are there, no doubt, as many good angels that watch over us for our good: and as those are wonderfully busy and active to throw rubs and stumblingblocks in our way; so, on the other side, these are every whit as industrious, not only to help us to get over those difficulties and temptations, but to present us with fair occasions of making our own advantage by them. Here are

then temptations on both sides, and tempters on both sides, to set home those temptations. The only question is, whether of these have the greater force? But this question needs no great labour or skill to answer it. It is just as if we should ask, whether God or the Devil be stronger? whether the temptation of a light momentary pleasure, and that mingled with a great deal of trouble and vexation, can be more prevalent over a reasonable creature, than the hopes of an inconceivably great and eternal weight of glory? or, lastly, whether the spirit that *works in the children of disobedience* can overpower that Spirit of Christ which once triumphed over all the powers of darkness, and made show of them openly? But certainly this can bear no dispute. For every one that believes God to govern the world, and Christ Jesus to have been sent by him, will readily say with the apostle, in the fourth of the first of St. John, that *greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world*: that is, the good Spirit of God, and his holy angels that do attend him, are far more willing and more powerful to do us good, to tempt us to our profit, than the Devil and his angels can be to do us hurt, and to tempt us to our mischief. And if any of us do miscarry, the reason is, not that we have not more strong temptations to virtue than to vice, but because we are unaccountably *drawn away by our own lusts, and enticed*, as St. James expresses it in the words after my text.

The application I desire to make to these three last points is twofold.

In the first place, let every one learn, from what has been said, never to charge the sins or miscar-

riages of his life, either directly or indirectly, upon God. Let nobody say, when he hath lived a careless or a lewd life, or is under the power and dominion of any vicious habit, that God was any way the cause of it; for *God tempteth no man*.

And here two sorts of persons are to be blamed.

First, They who excuse their sins upon a pretence that the condition of their lives did necessarily engage them in them. Such temptations were naturally consequent upon the circumstances that divine Providence had placed them in, that they must have been more than men to have resisted them. But this is a very unreasonable pretence; for it is certain God never puts thee into such a condition but thou mightest, if thou pleased, not only live very innocently in it, but laudably too: so as not only to have done thyself a great deal of good, but also to have brought honour to thy Christian profession. And if thou art in circumstances wherein thou canst not so behave thyself, it is certain God did not place thee in them, but thine own folly and evil courses have brought them upon thee.

Secondly, As much to be blamed are they who plead the want of God's grace for the wickedness of their lives; who think that the spiritual assistances which God afforded them were not sufficient for the reclaiming the badness of their natures. But how vain is this pretence! Canst thou say that ever in thy life thou didst an evil action for which thy conscience flew in thy face, but thou mightest have avoided it, if thou hadst pleased, as well as done it? Was ever God wanting to thee? Hast thou not found his holy Spirit ready at all times to suggest good thoughts to thy mind, and to give thee power-

ful reasons why thou shouldest not yield to the present temptation? and if thou wouldest have considered them, thou hadst certainly not done as thou didst. This, if thou wilt consult thine own conscience, thou canst not deny. And if thou hast now brought thyself to such a pitch of impotence or sottishness, that thou art blindly hurried away by thy appetites and passions, and seemest to be under a necessity of sinning, who art thou to thank for this, but thyself? God gave thee grace sufficient; nay, for any thing thou dost or can know to the contrary, as much grace as he giveth to any man in thy circumstances. But thou, by despising it, and constantly abusing it, hast made thyself unworthy of it; and now, perhaps, God hath withdrawn it, *and given thee over to a reprobate mind, to commit sin with greediness*, Eph. iv. 19; without check or reluctance whilst it is a committing, and without reflection or remorse afterwards.

This, it is true, is a dismal condition; but it is thou that hast brought thyself into it; and that very consideration, if thou shouldest die in that condition, will be the greatest torment to thee hereafter, viz. to think that God was not wanting to thee any ways, but thou mightest have been as eternally happy as any saint in heaven, but that thou, silly, inconsiderate fool as thou wert, having a prize put into thy hands, hadst not an heart to make use thereof.

The second use I would make of the doctrine I have delivered is for the encouragement of all Christians to go vigorously in the Christian warfare, how many temptations soever they may be assaulted with.

And here likewise the foregoing discourse naturally leads me to recommend two things to you in

order to that encouragement. I just name them, and conclude.

First, do you find it a difficult matter to live virtuously, and to preserve your innocence in this world, through the multitude of temptations and snares with which you are every where beset? Be not dismayed at this, neither cease your endeavour to live as you should do: only put your trust in God, and, by constant application to him, cast yourselves under his protection. Assure yourselves that, if you seriously mind his service, and with all your souls endeavour to recommend yourselves to him, he will take care of you: he will support you: he will so order matters, as that either such trials and temptations as you most dread shall not come upon you; or if they do come, he will give you strength to go through with them, and *the trials of your faith shall succeed to praise and honour and glory*, (as St. Peter speaks, 1 Ep. i. 7.) Never was any man baffled by the Devil, or any of his artifices, that did heartily cleave to God, and constantly implore his protection. It is either our own gross carelessness in the ways of God, or our immoderate, vicious concern for our worldly or sensual interests, that occasions our fall in the day of temptation. Let us entirely devote ourselves to God, and follow the dictates of our conscience in the plain instances of our duty, and there is no doubt but he will direct us, and govern us in all the circumstances and all the events of our lives, and bring us safely at last, through all the temptations of this world, to his everlasting kingdom.

The second thing I would recommend to you upon occasion of this Discourse is, that you would not take too short and scanty measures of what a Christian

ought to do, or what he may attain to, upon account of the manifold temptations that do assault you. You may be apt to think, because your natures are so very weak and frail, and temptations so thick and powerful, that it is but exceeding little that with all your endeavours you are able to perform in a virtuous and religious life. If you can but keep out of gross sins, and make a shift to say your prayers constantly, and so frame your lives that your conscience doth not accuse you of the great immoralities of human life, you think is as great an attainment as is to be expected. Why, I grant even this is very well; and I would to God that all our professors of Christianity would go thus far: we should then have a much better world than we have. But is there no more expected from Christians? hath God shewed you your duty so clearly in his holy word? hath he given you such exceeding precious promises to excite you to the performance of that duty? hath he laid such inexpressible obligations upon you to be serious and diligent in it? and, lastly, doth he every day encourage you with such powerful assistances, tempting you more strongly than the Devil and all his agents can do; giving his holy Spirit into your hearts, to guide and direct you, to comfort and refresh you, to strengthen and establish you, and sending forth likewise his holy angels, to be a guard about you, and to defend you continually from the snares and machinations of the powers of darkness? and after all this considered, can you satisfy yourselves with this, that you are not very bad?

For shame! Christians, if ye will be called by that name, rouse up yourselves to better thoughts. Do not take up with such a low degree of virtue, as that

which you seem to have set to yourselves ; but aspire after greater matters. Labour to be like your Lord and Master, *who though he was tempted in all things like us*, yet vanquished all temptations, and ran a glorious course, which he hath proposed to all his disciples to follow him in.

Look upon those that next followed him; the great apostles, the glorious martyrs, the whole succession of Christians for some ages. They all call upon you *to be followers of them, as they were of Christ Jesus*. They were eminent in their generation, and *shone forth as lights in the world*. They did not think it enough not to live viciously, but thought themselves obliged to give examples of a great virtue to others, *abounding in all the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, and longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*, and every other excellent quality.

And now these are all dead in the faith of Christ, and have attained the glorious rewards that our Lord promised. And shall not we who survive, and expect to be crowned at last, as they are, shall not we give some testimonies that we are their successors ; at least that we are of that religion that they were of? We have the same precepts that they had ; the same promises, and the same assistances. Where then is our Christianity, if we do not imitate them? O then, let us endeavour to walk in their steps ; let us at least *lay aside every weight, and all the sins that do so easily beset us, and run with patience and cheerfulness, with zeal and perseverance, that noble race that is set before us* : which that we may all do, God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

A S E R M O N

ON

ECCLESIASTES II. 11.

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

THESE words contain one of those conclusions that Solomon draws from the several experiments which he had made in his search after happiness. And if we consider by whom they were spoken, and upon how much consideration, and after what trials and experience, we may depend upon it that they are, though a short, yet a very true description and representation of the state of human life. And consequently that there is very little prospect of any man's being happy here, that hath no views beyond the things of this present world. There is no man living can ever expect to be in more happy outward circumstances than Solomon was, or to enjoy more of this world's good than Solomon did. And if he, after all, found nothing but labour and trouble, and dissatisfaction and emptiness, no real profit, no advantage in any worldly thing, what must we, *that come after the king*, (as he expreseth it in this chapter, ver. 12; what must we,) expect to find? Certainly no better fortune than he did.

And if this be the case of mankind, how unaccountable is it that any of us should fix our thoughts

and designs, our comforts and expectancies upon any thing under the sun ! And yet, God knows, thus most of us do ; *Though the bed is shorter than that we can stretch ourselves upon it ; and the covering narrower than that we can wrap ourselves in it ;* (as the prophet speaks, Isai. xxviii. 20.) nay, though every thing in nature calls upon us, (in the words of another prophet, Micah ii. 10.) saying, *Arise, for this is not your rest ;* yet, vain men ! we will needs set up our rest here : we are willing to think of nothing further than this world : we are so wholly immersed in the businesses and concerns of this present life, that we have no room or leisure for the thoughts of that which is to come. If it would please God to let us live always as we do, we should be well content, we should desire nothing more. We should say to God, as one of the apostles did once to our Saviour, *Lord, it is good for us to be here,* Matt. xvii. 4.

But how absurd are these wishes ! how ridiculous is this carriage ! Nothing in the world can apologize for it. It is just the same folly that those men are guilty of, that being tossed up and down at sea, yet nevertheless desire to be still there, and cannot endure to think of coming to a port. It is the madness of those, that being condemned to dig in the mines, are so much in love with toil and labour, with chains and darkness, that they despise a life above ground, a life of light and liberty. In a word, it is the fantastic punishment of Tantalus in the poets that these men wish for themselves ; they desire to spend their time for ever in gaping after those lovely pleasant fruits, which (they fancy) seem almost to touch their mouths. Yet all their labour

is in vain ; and as they never did, so they never shall be able to come at them.

Will you give me leave, in pursuance of my text, to make good this by an induction of particulars. From hence you will too plainly see the truth of Solomon's proposition, and consequently how foolish it is to look for happiness in any thing of this world.

1. And first of all, let us consider the continual toil and labour that mankind in this world are exposed to. Such is the state of human things, that there are very few hours of our lives in which we are at ease, and free from care and travail : but mostly we are in a hurry, and one labour still succeeds on the neck of another. The despatching of one business is but the making room for some other, and possibly more troublesome one that is presently to follow after. We toil till we are weary, and have exhausted our strength and spirits, and then we think to refresh and recruit ourselves ; but, alas ! that refreshment is only to prepare and enable us for the bearing the next hour's burden, which will inevitably come upon us. We are all of us, more or less, servants and bondmen, under a constant and fatal necessity of doing drudgery. What a world of pains and hardships is undergone by a great part of mankind merely for getting a livelihood, a subsistence for themselves and their families ! though, God knows, it is oftentimes a very mean one ; they, with all their toil and labour, having much ado to keep themselves from a prison or an hospital. As for others, that are put by Providence into better outward circumstances, they are never a jot the more free from anxiety and cares. For though they are provided of necessary supports, yet the desire of

maintaining their credit in the world, and living up to the height of their quality and fortune, or the ambition of advancing their families, and leaving their children in more splendid circumstances than they find themselves; I say, one of these things puts them upon the necessity of continually harassing their minds with worldly solicitude, and drudging as if they had nothing to depend upon. Those that are not troubled with the pangs of covetousness, but are well content with that portion that God hath given them, yet find difficulty and vexation enough in the very discharge of their callings and employments. Or suppose they have no calling to follow, but seem to be loose from the world, yet it is scarce possible for them to live without driving on some designs, either of pleasure or ambition, or twenty other things, according as their temper inclines them. And the carrying on these designs doth put their heads as much upon the rack, and oblige them to as laborious and active a diligence, as if they were some of the busy men of the world; nay, that course of life which of all others seems the quietest and the least cumbersome, viz. the abstracting ourselves from the world, and applying our minds to contemplation and the knowledge of things, yet doth even that (such is our frame in this world) engage men in as much labour as any of the rest: *He that increaseth knowledge increaseth trouble*, Eccles. i. 18. *And much study is a weariness of the flesh*, as Solomon tells us, chap. xii. 12.

In a word, this whole life is nothing else but a circle of cares, and designs, and business, and vexations: *Man is born to labour and trouble, as the sparks fly upwards*, Job v. 7; and therefore to term

this sublunary world a place of ease and repose, is the improperest name we can call it by.

2. But, secondly, this is not all: we might possibly find some comfort in that pains and labour we take in this world, at least they would be much more supportable, if we were sure our designs would always succeed; if we were sure to attain that which we labour for: but, alas! it is oftentimes quite otherwise. We meet with frequent disappointments in our endeavours; nay, we cannot say beforehand of any thing we undertake, that it shall certainly come to pass as we would have it. And this is a matter that renders the world a place of still more restlessness and disquiet. Would it not vex a man, when he hath set his heart upon a thing, and hath laid his plots for the bringing it about as well as the wit of man can devise, and hath pursued the business with great industry and diligence, hath made his friends, hath removed, as he thinks, all the rubs that lay between him and his designs, and hath brought matters to that pass that he seems just upon the point of obtaining his wishes; and yet in a moment, by some unforeseen cause or unthought-of accident, which it was not in the power of man to prevent, to be defeated of his expectations, to have his hopes blasted, and to be but just where he was before? And yet this is nothing but what every day happens in the course of the world, and is impossible to be avoided. Nay, in truth, considering upon what a multitude of things the success of our designs or endeavours doth depend, (none of which are yet in our power,) we have reason to wonder that our labours do succeed so often as they do, rather than that they miscarry so frequently.

If now it be a state of happiness to be always busy and designing, and yet always to be uncertain whether our designs shall take effect ; to be passionate and earnest and impatient in our desires of many things, and yet, for once obtaining what we desire, to be twice disappointed ; to tire ourselves with bustling to obtain our ends, and yet often to reap nothing but the wind for all our pains ; I say, if this be happiness, if this be the life we can sit down content with, then we may call this world a happy place : otherwise not.

3. But, thirdly, this is not all yet. Supposing, after several disappointments, and with much difficulty, we do attain our ends, and get what our souls desired, yet doth the thing answer our expectation ? do we find that it is fit and good and convenient for us ? If so, then we seem to have laboured to some purpose. But if not, then we are but still where we were ; nay, we had better never have troubled our heads about it. But now that it frequently happens in the world that men long passionately, and take a great deal of pains for those things which, when they are once possessed of, they find quite different from what they hoped for, and very much unfitting their circumstances, is too much attested by the experience of mankind to be denied. We are fanciful in our desires and appetites, and many times direct our choice and designs, not so much by our own needs and necessities, as the opinions of other men. We think every thing that is fine or brave, that is esteemed or set by in the world, will presently become us. But then, after we have with much toil got what we wished for, then we find ourselves mis-

taken in our counsels; we see we had better have been without those things; we see that instead of contributing to our happiness, they expose us to a great many more troubles and mischiefs than the condition we were in before. The truth is, we do not know beforehand what is good for us in this world, and yet we will not leave the ordering our condition to God, who only doth know. But we will needs be projecting for ourselves, and we do with might and main carry on those projects; and God is sometimes pleased to permit them to take effect: and the event is, that by our own choice, and at the expense of abundance of pains, we make ourselves unhappy. The generality of men, not content with that portion of outward goods which is allotted them, will needs be rich in spite of their destiny; and some of them succeed in their wishes: but not having tempers and spirits contrived for great fortunes, this wealth of theirs doth engage them in many great follies and vices, (that without it possibly they had never been guilty of,) which, in the end, do often prove their undoing. Those that have no children, how desirous are they of them! and yet who knows but, if God grant their desires, those children might prove the greatest torments to them that ever befell them! Few love to live in obscurity, but would be somebody, would be in a conspicuous station in the world: yet it may be, when they have attained to great places, they are not qualified for them, they are not fit to manage them; and their heads being too weak to look down from such a precipice, they either grow dizzy, and stand trembling, or tumble down with a much greater ruin.

And as it is in these instances, so it is proportionably with most of the other designs we pursue in this world, whether they be little or great.

So that, in truth, the lot of mankind in this life is very hard. In all our labours we either hit or miss; we either succeed or are disappointed. If we be disappointed, we are certainly troubled; and if we do succeed, for any thing we know, that very success may prove our greatest unhappiness.

4. But, fourthly, to go a little further yet; let us suppose that we have brought no inconvenience upon ourselves by our choice; let us suppose our designs were reasonable, and they rightly succeeded, and the circumstances of our condition are every way fit and proper for us; yet, is this sufficient to procure us content? may we then say to ourselves, *Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry?* Alas! there is too much reason to fear the contrary; for such is the constitution of this world, that, let us be in what circumstances we will, yet we shall meet with many troubles and inconveniences that do necessarily flow from the nature of that condition which we are in, though otherwise it may be the fittest for us of all others. There is no state of life, even the most desirable, but is attended with many peculiar disadvantages of its own. Others possibly, that are at a distance, may not see this. They may think us very happy; they may admire our good fortune, that were born under such lucky planets. They believe we live free from all manner of inquietude and discontent. But we know other things. We feel where our shoe pincheth us. We are sensible that if others saw into our state as much as we do ourselves, they would not be so apt to envy us. Nay, so far are even

the happiest among us from pleasing ourselves in our ways of living, that we often think we see others that are happier than we, and with whom, as to many things, we would willingly change conditions. Are we engaged in a life of action and business? how do we applaud the happiness of those that live in ease and privacy, and can command their own time! Do we, on the contrary, live in retirement, and have but few affairs to mind? Why then our time lies upon our hands, and we complain for want of employment, and call only those happy that are men of business. Are we in great and splendid circumstances, above the rank of common men? Then we feel the cares and burdens that this brings upon us, and only cry up the secure, quiet state of those that live in a lower sphere. But are we, on the contrary, in a low condition? Who then with us, but the great men that carry the world before them? Thus are we generally unsatisfied with the present condition in which we are, and apt to like any other better than our own.

Now this kind of discontent doth not always arise from the inconstancy of our minds, but from the particular grievances and inconveniences that our state of life is attended with; which we, being in that state, are extremely sensible of: but we consider not that there are the same, or as great, in other conditions. Briefly, our way in this world is all strewed with briers and thorns; we can tread nowhere but our feet are pricked. There is no sincere, unmingled good to be met with. Every state of life, as it hath something of good in it, so the best hath some evil, displeasing appendages inseparably adhering to it. Nay, perhaps, in true speaking, the

worldly happiness of any man's condition is not to be measured by the multitude of goods he enjoyeth in it, but rather by the fewness of the evils it brings upon him.

5. But, fifthly, to go further yet; let us suppose we find no inconvenience in the circumstances of our lives; we will suppose we are possessed of many goods, from the enjoyment of which we may promise to ourselves solid contentment and satisfaction: these are our present thoughts. But are we sure we shall always continue in the same mind? are we sure that that which is now very grateful and agreeable, and affects us with a sensible pleasure and delight, will continue always to do so? On the contrary, have we not much reason to fear, that, in a little time, it will grow dull and unaffecting; nay, possibly, very irksome and displeasing? Such is the nature of mankind, or the nature of things themselves, that no earthly delight or comfort can please us long. We are, indeed, very fond of them at the first, and are much tickled and transported with them: but after we have a while enjoyed them, we are cloyed; our appetites to them are gone, and we throw them behind us, as children do those play-toys that at first they were wonderfully fond of. The greatest blessings of this world are to the mind of man as any one sort of fare, though never so delicious, is to a weak stomach; by long usage they become flat and unsavoury, and have quite another relish than they had at first, when they were novelties to us.

6. But I have not yet done with this point. To all these things let us add, in the sixth place, the numberless daily troubles and discomposures of mind,

not peculiar to any condition, as those I spoke of before, but common to all, arising from men's minds and tempers, and the things and persons they converse with in the world. It is a melancholy consideration ; but I believe the experience of mankind will make it good, that there is scarce a day in our lives that we pass in perfect, uninterrupted peace and content, but something or other every day happens that gives us trouble, and makes us uneasy to ourselves. Nor do I speak this only of the extremely vicious, or the extremely unfortunate, the greatest part of whose lives is certainly very irksome and troublesome to them, but of those persons that are the happiest, those that have the least reason to complain either of their outward or inward condition.

Let any man pick out any day of his life, and seriously observe the particular passages of it, and the state of his own mind under those passages, and I am confident he will find, that, though the evil of that day doth not counterbalance the good, yet it is sufficient to interrupt his happiness, and to render him very unsatisfied, as to several things. Either he finds himself dull, or out of humour ; or he is persecuted by some very unagreeable company ; or he saith or doth something that he afterwards severely reflects on ; or he is displeased with some language or carriage of others towards him ; or he is put out of his temper by some ill news, or the miscarriage of some of his affairs ; or he finds some troublesome passion to arise in him that disturbs the peace of his spirit ; he is racked with fears or with hopes ; or discomposed with anger and peevishness ; or he is haunted with the memory of some

past folly or sin ; or he is dispirited with too much labour ; or dull for want of employment ; or vexed with some troublesome business ; or cloyed with his recreations and divertisements ; or something or other he doth or suffereth that is not very grateful to him. The discontents which arise from such causes as these are indeed infinite and innumerable ; and though, singly taken, they are very small matters, yet being taken in the lump, and likewise coming so thick upon us every day, they really make human life, in the general, and as to most of the periods of it, to be a troublesome, unquiet, unsatisfactory thing.

7. But, seventhly, if these little things I have mentioned be considerable enough to trouble our days, what must we say of the many sad accidents, and more grievous and weighty afflictions, that do frequently exercise the patience of mankind ? If in the best condition of human life men are not happy, but every thing is able to ruffle and disorder them, O how miserable are they in the worst ! It is true, all men do not suffer equally, but some much more than others ; but yet he that is afflicted least in this world hath his sufficient share of pain and anguish, and feels enough to try his courage and his patience to the uttermost ; especially if to the consideration of his own sufferings he adds the bitter things that he sees others undergo, some of which may likewise come to his own share before he goes out of the world.

It is able, in truth, to draw tears from one's eyes seriously to reflect upon the sad, deplorable, calamitous condition of a great part of mankind in this world ; to exhibit to our minds that dismal scene of

things that are every day presented to our eyes. Here are some languishing under a long and tedious distemper, unfit for all the functions, and incapable of any of the enjoyments of life. Others roaring out for the extremity of torture they suffer from the stone, or the gout, or an ulcer, or a broken limb, or some such other tormenting accident. Others mourning for the loss of a dear parent, on whom they depended ; or the death of a child, who was the stay and comfort of their age. Others fretting and fuming for the disgraceful circumstances they are fallen into from an high fortune. Others even heart-broken for the poverty and necessity to which they are reduced through the profuseness of their lives, or the misadventures of trade, or the ruins of a fire, or the calamities of a war. Others groaning and howling under the whips and stings of an awakened conscience, being filled with horror and amazement and despair, from the sense of their crimes, and the apprehensions of the vengeance of God in the other world. Others (which is indeed the saddest sight of all) wallowing in all manner of sensuality and wickedness, giving up the reins to their brutish appetites, committing all sorts of villainies, murders, rapines, and beastialities, without sense of God or religion ; regardless of their own souls, or the souls of others ; dishonouring their profession, blaspheming his name that made them, and, in a word, making all the haste they can to everlasting damnation.

These things are very sad, and must deeply affect us, though we ourselves were not concerned in them. But, alas ! we are none of us mere spectators of the miseries of others ; we must expect to bear a great

part ourselves in this tragedy. So long as we have mortal bodies exposed to sickness and diseases, to sad accidents and casualties; so long as we have a frail nature that betrays us to a thousand follies and sins; so long as we have dear friends and relations, or children, that we may be deprived of; so long as we may prove unfortunate in our marriage, or in our posterity, or in the condition of life we have chosen; so long as there are men to slander us, or to rob us, or to undermine us; so long as there are storms at sea, or fire upon land; so long as there are enemies abroad, or tumults, seditions, and turns of state at home: I say, so long as we are exposed to these things, we must, every one of us, expect, in some degree or other, to bear a share in the miseries of the world.

And now, all these things considered, judge ye whether this world doth look like a place of rest; whether it is not rather a stage of calamities and sad events. Judge ye whether the best of human things be not (as Solomon here tells us) *vanity*; but the worst of them intolerable *vexation of spirit*.

8. Which will still appear the more evident, if, in the eighth and last place, we add this, namely, That though all we have hitherto said did go for nothing; though we could be supposed to be exempted from all those inconveniences and mischiefs I have mentioned; though we could be supposed to be capable of an uninterrupted enjoyment of the good things of this life as long as we live; (which yet, you see, in the constitution of things, is impossible;) yet even this would not satisfy much to the making our state in this world easy and happy; for there is one thing still would spoil all such hopes and pre-

tences, and that is, the *fear of death*, which, as St. Paul truly observes, hath made mankind *all their lifetime subject to bondage*, Heb. ii. 15. For a man to consider that how happy and prosperous soever his circumstances are, yet he is mortal as well as other folks; he must in a little time die, as he sees his neighbours do, and leave all his comforts behind him; O what a dismal reflection must this needs be to a man who hath set up his rest in this world, and dreams of no other happiness but what he hath here! to think that in a few years at the furthest, but possibly in a few months or days, (for no man knows how soon the time will come that God will call him,) he shall *lie down in the dust*, and then all that he hath here possessed and enjoyed is lost and gone, irrecoverably gone! only there is his carriage and behaviour in this world, his virtues and his vices, his thoughts and words and actions, that will go with him into the other world; and these must be severely scanned and accounted for! I say, for a man that hath no other aims in this world, to consider these things, how ungrateful, how tormenting must the thought of them be! what rest, what peace can accrue to him from all the satisfactions of this life! This business of dying, and what is to come after it, is such a bitter sauce, such a mixture of gall and wormwood to all a sensual man's enjoyments, that it is impossible to avoid the being miserable under the apprehensions of it.

O that we would seriously think upon these things! We should certainly have this advantage by it, that we should not any longer be cheated with the gaudy appearances of this world, but look after something more solid, more substantial, than

any thing we find here, to live for, to set our hearts and affections upon. We should tremble to think of having *received our good things in this life*, and look upon ourselves as most wretched, forlorn creatures, if we had no further hopes and expectancies. And this is the use for which I intended all this Discourse, which I beg leave a little to insist upon, and then I conclude.

I have given you, you see, a picture, as well as I could draw it, of the state of this present world, and the condition of that man who looks no further than it. And this, in order (as I told you at the beginning) to the shewing the folly and madness of placing our happiness in any thing here to the neglect of heaven and eternity. But I am sensible this account I have given will be apt to give offence to some : they will say, that all this declamation against the world is little better than a libel against the divine Providence. For what doth the representing human life as so imperfect, so dull, so miserable an estate ; what doth this mean, but to call the goodness and wisdom of God into question, since he might as easily have contrived it better ?

I answer, No such matter. There will appear no colour for this objection, if we would consider that God seems on purpose to have framed this earthly state so short and imperfect, and obnoxious to evils, as we find it, that we might not set our hearts upon it ; that we might not think of fixing here, but should esteem ourselves *strangers and pilgrims*, and look up to him *for an abiding and continuing city in another country*. If God had intended that this world should have been our dwellingplace for

ever, he would certainly have so contrived the frame of it, and so have ordered all its affairs, and he would likewise have so suited our natures and faculties thereunto, that every good man, at least, should never have failed of enjoying all the satisfactions and happiness here that he was capable of. But since God designed men for another and a more glorious place than this world, and sent them hither only as probationers, or by way of trial, how they would use those talents that he gave them, and in order to the fitting them for that glorious and eternal inheritance above; it was the greatest kindness God could do us, not to make this world too tempting a place, but to exercise all that come into it with such labours and difficulties and uneasinesses, that none, that hath his wits about him, may be fond of it, but groan after those eternal mansions that God hath provided for all good men in heaven. We come hither as into a school, or place of exercise, that, by the severe discipline that is here used, we might be trained up and fitted for a glorious and immortal state. So that it is for great good ends to us that we are no happier in this world, and consequently it is no disparagement to the goodness of God.

Others will be apt to quarrel with the description I have given of the state of this world, upon account that it is so melancholy and uncomfortable. This account of things, say they, takes away from us all possibility of any tolerable content or happiness in this life.

But to them I answer, No, by no means; but only from those persons that expect no other state but

this, and therefore live in the world as if they were to live there always. Such men as these, I have sufficiently shewed, will always be miserable in the best circumstances of life, and therefore much more in the worse ones. But there is a way of being very happy, very contented, nay, of perpetually rejoicing in this world. And that is, to sit as loose as we can from it : not to enslave ourselves to it ; but to govern our affections and appetites and passions by the rule of reason and the word of God : to remember that we were made for the enjoyment of God, and therefore to love him above all things, to place our hope, our confidence, our trust, our dependance, our joy and comfort in him, and him only : to make it the business of our lives to approve ourselves to him, by keeping a clear and unspotted conscience, by practising righteousness and sobriety and godliness in all our conversation : and, lastly, to cast up our eyes continually to those glorious rewards that our Saviour hath provided for us in the regions above ; so that heaven may have our hearts, our affections, while this world hath our bodies. If we frame our minds and lives according to these measures, we shall never be miserable, let the world be as calamitous as it will. We shall be out of the reach of the common accidents and disasters of human life ; that is to say, though they come upon us, yet they shall not harm or dismay us. We shall have something to support us, and to bear up our spirits against every ruffle, every disappointment, every thing that can come cross to us. And, to conclude, as we shall enjoy abundance of peace and comfort in this world, though mixed with some un-

easiness, so, when we come to die, we shall be the most glorious, happy creatures that words can express, or the mind of man conceive; for then we shall enter into that eternal rest *which God hath prepared for them that love him*: which that we may all do, God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

A S E R M O N

ON

2 PETER I. 10.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.

IN treating on this text, I shall speak to these four points :

I. What is meant by *making our calling and election sure*.

II. How, or by what means, they are *to be made sure*.

III. What it is *to give all diligence to make them sure*.

IV. The great obligations that lie upon all of us *to give all diligence*.

I. I begin with the first point, What it is *to make our calling and election sure*.

And here we must first inquire what is meant by *our calling and election* : and then what it is *to make them sure*.

1. As for this word *calling*, it is generally used in the New Testament to express that especial grace and mercy of God, by which men are brought to the belief and profession of Christ's religion. That this is the scripture notion of *calling* would be easy to shew, by a particular enumeration of those texts where this word is used ; but I shall only now mention two or three principal ones, which give light to this matter.

Ye see, brethren, (says St. Paul, 1 Cor. i. 26.) your

calling, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: where the being *called* is nothing else but the becoming Christians. And the sense of the place is this; that however the rich, the great, and worldly-wise men might have the gospel preached to them, and were invited to the Christian profession, yet few of them did receive that invitation, or were effectually *called*, it being chiefly the poorer and humbler sort of men that gave in their names to Christ.

Thus again: *I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation* (calling) *wherewith ye are called*, Eph. iv. 1. That is, in plain English, Let your lives and conversations be suitable to that Christian profession that God hath honoured you with.

Thus again, St. Paul affirms of all Christians, of all that are within the pale of the church, that they are *called with an holy calling*, 2 Tim. i. 9. and that they *are partakers of the heavenly calling*, Heb. iii. 1: and, lastly, in his language *the called* are those that are opposed to the infidels, whether they were Jews or Greeks, 1 Cor. i. 24.

We see by these passages what is the notion of our *calling*; for as for the other term in my text, that of *election*, whatever that word may signify in other places, yet here it seems to mean the same thing, in effect, with *calling*. If there be any difference between them, it is this, that our *calling* respects our being actually brought over to the belief of Christ's religion; our *election* respects God's purposes and designs in conferring those privileges upon us long before we were in being. The latter word expresses God's eternal design of grace and mercy to us, in putting us into a condition of salvation by

Jesus Christ; the former word expresses his actual execution of those designs, by actually bringing us, in the course of his providence, to the knowledge and belief of Christ Jesus.

This difference, I say, we may make between these words, if we will criticise upon them: but still, as I said, in effect they come to the same thing. For whosoever is *called of God* is also *elected of God*, in this sense of the word *elect*; and hence it is that all Christians, in opposition to pagans and infidels, are called *an elect generation*, 1 Pet. i. 9; just as all the Israelites, in opposition to the nations about them, are frequently in the Old Testament called *an elect people*.

It is true, there is in scripture another notion of the elect than what I have now given, viz. where they are taken for those that not only enjoy the outward privileges of the gospel, but really walk worthy of them, and so are actually approved of God. Now to be *elect* in this sense is something more than *to be called*; and in this sense it is that our Saviour is to be understood, when he tells us more than once, that *many are the called, but few are the elect or chosen*, Matt. xx. 16. xxii. 14. Which we are not to understand thus; Many are those that are called to be Christians, but few are those that are decreed to be saved; (for though this sense may be orthodox, yet it doth not at all agree with the scope of our Saviour's words;) but we are to understand his speech thus; Many there are that come in at the call of the Gospel, and list themselves among the number of the Christian professors; but few are those that live up to that profession, and so are accepted and approved of God as worthy Christians.

But the being elect in this sense is not the election that my text here speaks of: for this election is already made sure and firm by the sincere obedience of the persons so elected. But the election spoken of in my text is supposed not yet to be so; but we are exhorted to make it so. It would be a vain thing for the apostle to bid us *give all diligence to make our election sure*, if it was already sure without our diligence.

II. And thus much of the notion and importance of those terms *calling* and *election*. And from what has been said concerning them, it will be easy to gather, in the second place, what it is to *make them sure*. For since by our calling and election is meant the free grace and favour of God in bringing us to the knowledge and profession of his gospel, and owning us for his own people, and as such, designing us to glory and happiness; the making of these sure or firm must be the taking care that we do not *receive this grace of God in vain*; but that it may really prove effectual to us, that is to say, that we may actually obtain the benefits that were intended us thereby, viz. the everlasting salvation of our souls.

I know there are some that would give another account of *making our calling and election sure*. They suppose that they are already sure in the event; so that no man, who is called and elected, can finally lose the benefits of them. But the apostle would have us further to make them sure to ourselves; that is, to use all diligence to get ourselves assured that we are in the number of those that are called and elected to salvation; and that this is all that he meant by this exhortation. But I think this gloss is without any foundation; nay, is rather expressly

contrary to the design of the apostle in this place. For it is plain, that he here speaks of such a *calling and election*, as that one who is so called and elected may yet fall away, and finally miscarry: else why doth he add in the next words, *If ye do these things, ye shall never fall*; which plainly implies, that if they did not do them, they might fall. Besides, the very words he here useth will hardly bear such a construction as those persons would put upon it; for *βεβαιὰν ποιεῖν* doth not signify *to get ourselves assured of a thing*, as they would have it, but *to make a thing firm and sure*; which is quite a different matter.

To this purpose, therefore, we may suppose St. Peter spoke to the Christians in my text: Great, O Christians, are the favours that God hath vouchsafed to you: he hath called you from the darkness of idolatry and superstition *to the light of his glorious gospel*. Ye, who were once *not a people*, are now *the peculiar treasure of the Lord*. Ye, who were once *the children of wrath*, are now, *through faith in Christ Jesus, begotten again to the hope of an eternal inheritance among the sons of God*. God hath chosen you out of the world to be his favourites here on the earth, and to crown you eternally in heaven. All these great things he hath done and designed for you. But then you must remember, that there is something to be done on your part, in order to the effectually reaping the benefits of these privileges. These promises of God are made to you upon certain conditions; which conditions if you do not perform, you may fail of obtaining them. Far therefore be it from you to live at random, without taking any further thought, presuming on

the favour of God, because you have the honour of being retainers to his Son. Far be it from you to be careless and unconcerned, as if indeed you were already secure of eternal happiness, because you have God's *calling and election* thereto. On the contrary, it will concern you to use your utmost care and diligence to qualify yourselves for the receiving the fruits and benefits of these mercies and favours of Christ Jesus, and by this means to render them firm and sure; that is to say, effectual to the good of your souls: which indeed otherwise will be so far from being advantages to you, that they will prove aggravations of your guilt and of your misery. For *how shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation*, as is brought to you by the Lord? *Fear therefore, lest a promise being left you of entering into his rest, any of you fall short thereof. Give all imaginable diligence to make sure to yourselves* those gracious designs of mercy that God had towards you, when he brought you to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And thus much of the first point, what it is to *make our calling and election sure*.

II. The next thing is, to inquire how or by what means this is to be done. Now, as to that, the text itself will afford us a sufficient answer, if we will follow the reading of the vulgar Latin translation, and many likewise of the ancient Greek copies: for they read it thus; *Wherefore the rather, my brethren, give all diligence by your good works to make your calling and election sure*: which reading doth indeed extremely well suit with what follows; *for if ye do these things ye shall never fall*. So that, according to this account, it is good works, or a course of virtuous actions, that must secure to us our call-

ing and election. And this is a true and certain account of the matter, whether the text be to be read thus or no; for it may plainly be concluded from the apostle's discourse, both before and after the text, *If ye do these things*, says he, *ye shall never fall*. These things! What things? Why certainly either good works, as I said before, are here referred to, or, if that clause be not in the text, then those things that the apostle had just been speaking of in the verses before the text, must be here understood. Now what these were you may see in the 5th verse; *And besides this*, says he, *giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins*, ver. 6—9. And then follow the words of my text, *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: but an entrance shall be administered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus*, ver. 10, 11. So that it is plain, from the apostle's discourse, that the things by which we must *make our calling and election sure*, are no other than the things which he had been before recommending, viz. the *adding to our faith virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity*; in a word, all the fruits

of a holy conversation. These are the things which *if we do, we shall never fall*: these are the things, upon our performance of which *an entrance shall be administered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus*. Faith alone will not do; but faith joined with universal obedience will; that is to say, a sincere and constant endeavour in all our thoughts and words and deeds, *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world*; this is that by which we must *make our calling and election sure*. And thus much of the second point.

III. The third thing is to inquire what is meant by *giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure*: now this phrase doth certainly import thus much, viz. that we must shake off all sloth and idleness, and with great industry and fervour and activity set ourselves upon the work.

We must not think that the eternal welfare of our souls can be secured by a few good thoughts or purposes, or now and then an act of repentance, or a fit of devotion, or some faint, languid endeavours to be good. Alas! who ever succeeded in any worldly design without more diligence? who ever got an estate, or attained to any complete degree of learning or knowledge, but was more eager and industrious in the pursuit of it than this amounts to? And can we think that heaven and eternal happiness can be purchased at a less price than a small perishing good? can we imagine that God will be so lavish of the greatest blessings he can bestow, that he will let them be earned with a less degree of application than will suffice to compass those blessings that he sets the least value upon, and which he vouchsafes often,

in the course of his providence, to the worst of mankind?

No; if ever we mean to secure that inestimable treasure to ourselves, we must lay out our whole selves upon it; it must have the first place in our esteem and in our affections; it must be the daily object of our thoughts and desires and meditations; we must hunger and thirst after it; we must study and contrive and take pains, all the ways we can, to get ourselves possessed of it. We must make it the great business and design of our lives, and not only a work by the by, a work to be despatched at leisure hours, when we have nothing else to do; in a word, *we must sell all we have to purchase it.* This, I am sure, is that which our Saviour tells us, Matt. xiii. 45, 46. *The kingdom of heaven, saith he, is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.* And again he tells us, that *the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force,* Matt. xi. 12: it is such a kingdom as cannot be entered but by assault and storm; that is to say, it will require the utmost of our resolution, and vigour, and vigilance, and constancy, for the attaining of it.

There is another thing that seems to be implied in this phrase of *giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure*; and that is, a concernment and solicitude about it, in opposition to presumption and vain confidence. He that useth that diligence about his salvation that so weighty a matter calls for, will not upon slight grounds and little appearances think himself to have secured it, and so give over all further concern about it. On the contrary,

he will be possessed with great apprehensions and anxiety, lest he should miscarry : he will be jealous over himself, lest he should not do his part towards the attaining of it ; he will think all his care and thoughtfulness little enough to ensure to himself so invaluable a blessing.

This is that temper of mind which the apostles do so often recommend to us when they bid us *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*, Phil. ii. 12 : when they bid us *not be highminded, but fear*, Rom. xi. 20 : when they bid us *serve God with reverence and godly fear*, Heb. xii. 28 : when they bid us *pass the time of our sojourning here in fear*, 1 Pet. i. 17 : lastly, when they bid us *fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into rest, any of us should fall short of it*, Heb. iv. 1. But, O, how contrary to this is the method that some among us have taken up, who, instead of this religious *fear and trembling*, with which the apostles exhort us to *work out our salvation*, make it their business to free themselves from all concern in this matter ! They will not allow themselves so much as to doubt of their salvation ; or, if at any time they do, they blame themselves for it, and look upon it as a sin, as an instance of their unbelief and want of faith ; for they place their very title to heaven in believing that they have a title to it. If they can but be persuaded strongly enough that Christ died for them in particular, and that he fulfilled the law in their stead ; and can but apply with confidence all his merits to themselves, and rest upon him alone for salvation, without any works of their own ; they think they have done all that is required under the new covenant ; and whoever talks of more doth not under-

stand the doctrine of free grace as it is there held forth. But then St. Paul was ignorant of the free grace of the gospel. Did not he understand the terms upon which we are to be saved? Yet see with what anxiety and solicitude he expresseth himself, even as to his own particular in this matter of his salvation: *If by any means, says he, I may attain to the resurrection of the dead, (that is, of the just.) Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect: but I follow after, that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press forward towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, Phil. iii. 11—14.* Thus doth the holy apostle declare his great concern and solicitous care that he used for the saving his own soul, when yet undoubtedly he had already as much assurance of it as any of us can nowadays pretend to: and if so much care was still necessary for him, will it not, at least, be as necessary for us? Shall we presume to think of our gaining the prize upon easier terms than he durst trust to? And thus much let it suffice to have spoken of our third general head in my proposed method.

IV. I come to the fourth and last, and that is, to stir you up to the practice of the apostle's exhortation in my text, viz. that you would *give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.*

Let me, therefore, in the name of the Lord Jesus, call upon all of you that have been hitherto negligent and careless in this matter, that you would

now at least seriously set about it. As you love your souls, leave not this affair any longer at random: do not sit down satisfied with the vain and uncertain hopes that you may do well enough hereafter, that you live in as good a condition as your neighbours; but with your whole might and strength apply yourselves to the working out that salvation which God hath called and elected you to.

And, in order hereunto, let me desire you seriously to think of what vast importance and concernment this business is to you. It is no trifling matter; it is not a thing that may be done, or left undone; but the happiness or misery of your whole life, and that to all eternity, depends upon it. The securing our future salvation is a concern truly infinite; all the other affairs we have to take care of in the world are but trifles to it. And ought not our care then and diligence in this matter to bear some proportion with the greatness of the concern we have in it? Is it not a wretched, foolish part in us to be busy about small matters, to be earnest and unwearied in the pursuit of little designs, such as a little wealth or pleasure or the like; which after a few years will signify nothing at all to us, nor shall we be one jot the better for them; and to be altogether careless and negligent of that affair, by which we must be concluded either the most happy or the most miserable of all creatures for ever? To shew the extreme folly of this kind of temper, put the case that you had nothing in the world to concern yourselves about but only your body, would not every one count you mad, if they saw you taking mighty care for the clothing or adorning some single limb, as, for instance, your hand or your foot, and

yet so regardless of the rest, as to leave them quite naked, and exposed to all the inconveniences of wind and weather? or if they saw you extremely solicitous about a scratch in your finger, and yet altogether unconcerned at a deep wound in your side, which, without speedy succour, might prove mortal to you? Why, in good earnest, every whit as foolishly and as unreasonably do you act, when, having an immortal soul to provide for as well as a body, you spend all your care upon this, and take no thought for the other; when you think no pains too much for the preventing or getting rid of some small temporal inconveniency, that may affect your bodies, and yet will hardly employ a thought how you may escape the everlasting damnation both of your souls and bodies in hell fire.

Ay, but, you will say, there is a great deal of difference between this life and that other, which you talk of. The one is present, and we are sure we must provide for the conveniences of it, or else we are miserable; but the other life we know little or nothing of: however, it is at a great distance, and therefore we cannot be presumed to be so immediately concerned about it, especially when such a concernment will contribute nothing to our present enjoyments, but will rather disturb them. Give us the present, and let those that will, take care of what is future.

Ay, but, my brethren, do we act thus in other cases? Have we not in all the purchases we make, in all the costs we lay out, nay, in all the projects we drive on in the world; have we not, I say, some regard to the time to come, as well as to the present? Certainly every wise man will consider his

future condition, as well as that he is now in ; and especially when it is such a condition as he must live in for ever, and that either extremely happily or extremely miserably ; whereas the life he now leads will be gone in a very few years at most : that which is now future will some time be present, and shall we not have other thoughts when it comes to be so ? shall we not be of another mind when we come to die ? shall we not then sadly reflect upon our past carelessness of eternity, because, forsooth, it was then in futurity ? shall we not then wish we had been less solicitous about our bodies and the affairs of this world, and more minded the concernments of our souls ? But neither indeed is the care of securing our future happiness so impertinent or so insignificant to our present life as we make it. On the contrary, it hath a mighty great influence upon the comfortable enjoying of ourselves in this world. He that hath taken all prudent care to secure his eternal estate, must needs lead an infinitely more easy, peaceful, and happy life, than they who do not. All the cross accidents and misfortunes that happen to him (and God knows no condition of life is free from them) are hereby sweetened and made more supportable. He goes to his work, and minds his worldly business more cheerfully ; his enjoyments are more sincere and undisturbed, and free from the allays of bitterness and grief and vexation : whereas the man that hath this great work still lying upon his hands, the very fears and apprehensions of what will come upon him hereafter (which he cannot for his life rid himself of) will frequently disquiet him, and render his condition, in the best of outward circumstances, very troublesome and uneasy.

But what if this talk of salvation and damnation in another world be but a mere fable? what if there be no such things, but they are only the dreams and fancies of melancholy people, or the fictions of crafty statesmen and priests, the better to bring people under their government? why should we then be at any pains to deny ourselves any present satisfaction for the sake of them? Pray let us first see some demonstration of the truth of these things.

Though I hope there are no persons professing Christianity that will talk at this rate; yet it is to be feared that there are some who in their hearts do much doubt of the truth of those things we are speaking of. But to such persons, instead of offering them demonstrations to convince them, (as indeed matters of this nature are not capable of being demonstrated in a strict sense, though yet, I doubt not, there is such evidence to be given for them, as, in a considering man, will create as full and strong an assent as if they were really demonstrable; I say, instead of offering them demonstrations,) I shall only propose a question or two, to be seriously considered by them, before they abandon themselves to a total neglect and unconcernedness about their spiritual condition.

First, I would ask, whether there be not some probability that these doctrines are true, viz. that there is another life after this; that there is a God, who will bring every man to account for his actions past, and reward him or punish him according to his good or evil life? Whether all the testimonies, drawn from the holy scriptures, the solemn declarations made by our Lord Jesus, who came down from heaven to ascertain us of these things, and the many

miracles he wrought for the confirmation of them, his own visible resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven; as likewise the many arguments that may be drawn from the notions of our own minds, the justice of God's providence, and the consent of all nations, in all ages, and of all religions, Jews, Turks, Pagans, as well as Christians; I say, whether all these do not at least amount to a probability that these things are true? Now, if it be confessed that these things are probable, will any man in his wits think it reasonable to live as if he was certain there was no such thing? Must he not rather conclude, that it is really his wisest way to do his endeavours to secure his own share of that future happiness, and to avoid the punishments that shall then come upon wicked men, since he acknowledgeth that it is likely, that it is probable, there will come a time of such happiness and such punishments?

But, secondly, if this be too much, if it will not be granted that there is so much as a probability in these things, I would only desire to know whether it is possible they should be true. This, sure, the most impudent atheist in the world will not deny; or if he doth, he must shew that it implies a contradiction they should be true, that they have in them a plain repugnancy to the common principles of reason; which sure none will affirm.

If now it be but granted that it is possible there should be another life after this, wherein virtuous, religious men shall be for ever happy, and the sensual, the wicked, the profane, for ever tormented; I say, is it not a man's interest that he should provide accordingly? Would not a man, in common prudence, take some pains to secure his interest in that

state; and doth he not run a desperate risk if he do not? For though it were odds there was no such state, yet what if there should prove one? what a condition were the man in then?

It is true, in other cases, where things are not likely to come to pass, we do not often think it reasonable to make provisions against them. But here the case is of such a nature, is of such vast, unspeakable, infinite importance to us, that the very possibility of its happening should, in all reason, put a man upon the using of means for the preventing hazards, especially when the means that are to be used are such as will not in the least make his present life more uncomfortable, or deprive him of any true real pleasure, or convenience, or satisfaction: but, on the contrary, as I said before, will increase his happiness even in this world. Though there was no heaven, no hell, a man loseth nothing that lives as if there were, but is rather a gainer by it: but if there should prove a heaven and a hell, a man loseth infinitely that lives not a religious life, for he is damned to all eternity.

Thus you see, that though we were even infidels, and did not believe another world, yet it would concern us to live as if there was.

But O how must this concernment be increased, when it is not only possible, nay, when it is not only highly probable, but when it is absolutely certain that all these things are true! that there *is verily a reward for the righteous*, that there is a hell for the wicked, and that there is a *God that judgeth the earth*. And that all this is so, we may be as certain, as we are certain that we shall all die: and when that time comes, (as how shortly and suddenly

it may come, we know not,) good Lord, in what a condition shall we be, if we have made no provision for our eternal state !

O therefore, my brethren, let us trifle no longer; let us squander away no more of our precious time in idleness, or pleasure, or sensuality, or a course of worldly business, to the neglect of our immortal souls, and their everlasting interests ; but let us presently enter upon our great work ; the *working out our own salvation, the making our calling and election sure*, by breaking loose from all our sins that hold us in captivity, and seriously giving up ourselves to the service of God in all those ways which Jesus Christ hath chalked out to us, *adding to our faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge ; and to knowledge temperance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience godliness ; and to godliness brotherly kindness and charity ; knowing, that if we do these things we shall never fall, but an entrance will be ministered to us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ : to which God of his infinite mercy bring us all, for the sake of the same his dear Son.*

To whom, &c.

A SERMON

ON

ROMANS II. 28, 29.

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

FOR the understanding the sense of these words, and what use we are to make of them, we must look back to what the apostle has been discoursing in this and the former chapter. His design in both these chapters is to set forth the great degeneracy and corruption that all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, lay in, both as to their manners and principles; and consequently the necessity of God's setting on foot a new dispensation, in order to the reformation and salvation of men; and that was the faith of Jesus Christ, without which it was impossible either for Jew or Gentile to plead a title to God's mercy.

He begins with the Gentiles, and shews largely how horribly blind and ignorant they were in the matters of God; how false and superstitious their religion and worship; and to what an height of wickedness and impiety, as to their practices, they were arrived to, so that they were altogether inexcusable before God.

But it might be said, the Jews were not in this deplorable condition: they were not strangers to the

true God, nor ignorant of his worship. God had made known his will to them by a revelation from heaven, and had adopted them for his own children. And they bore the mark of their being in covenant with him in their very flesh, besides abundance of other advantages that they had above all the world : so that they had great reason to believe themselves safe, whatever became of the Gentiles. Those poor people indeed they owned to be in a wretched state; but as for themselves, who were the people of God, and were able to teach his will to all the rest of the world, they sure could not be in danger of miscarrying.

This was the plea that the Jews made for themselves, and it is handsomely represented by St. Paul, in the seventeenth verse of this second chapter, where he begins to apply his discourse to them.

Behold, says he, *thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law ; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light to them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of the simple, having the platform of truth and knowledge of the law*, ver. 17—20. All this the Jews said of themselves : and St. Paul doth not deny but that they might say it, both with truth and reason. But what then ? were they therefore in a better condition, as to their spiritual everlasting state, than those poor heathens whom they so much despised ? No ; he tells them plainly, in nowise, but rather far more inexcusable, forasmuch as they did not make a right use of this light and knowledge that God had

afforded them above all other nations. This law, that they so much gloried in, had no influence upon their hearts and lives; they lived as lawlessly as if God had never revealed his will to them. Their practices were quite contradictory to their pretences and profession; and this their own consciences could not but reproach them with, and condemn them for. For what greater reproach can there be to a man, or what can more aggravate his guilt, than for him to pretend to be able *to teach others, and yet not to teach himself? to preach that a man should not steal, and yet to steal himself? to abhor idols and all idolatrous worship, and yet to be guilty of as great impiety against God another way, viz. committing of sacrilege? To make his boast of the law, and yet to dishonour God; nay, and to make his name blasphemed among the very Gentiles* by his open and scandalous violations of that law? ver. 21—24. And yet this was the case of the Jews, as St. Paul chargeth it upon them in the second verse of this chapter, and the four following.

And then, as for the business of circumcision, which they laid so mighty a stress upon, as that which was the seal of their covenant with God, and that which entitled them to his mercies and favour, he tells them, in the twenty-fifth verse, that *their circumcision would indeed profit them, if they kept the law: but if they were transgressors of the law, their circumcision was made uncircumcision*; that is to say, that circumcision was indeed a sacrament instituted by God for the entering that people into covenant with him, and for the sealing and conveying the benefits made over by that covenant to all those that were circumcised: but then it was upon

this supposition, upon this condition, that those who were so circumcised did perform the terms which that covenant required of them; that is to say, did live in the practice of inward purity and holiness, and obedience to God's commandments, which were the things signified by circumcision. But if they did not this, they were so far from reaping any spiritual benefits by their circumcision, that they had as good *not have been circumcised at all*, (that is the meaning of his phrase of their *circumcision being made uncircumcision*, ver. 25.) Nay, as he goes on in the next verse, (26.) the heathens themselves, if they lived better than the Jews, if they were more pure and holy, (ver. 27.) and more obedient to the laws of God written in their hearts, than the Jews were, though they had no circumcision in their flesh, yet were they, in a true sense, more properly Jews; that is to say, more truly *children of Abraham*, and entitled to the promises of God, and the benefits of the covenant made with him, than the carnal Jews, who had the mark of circumcision upon them. For, as he concludes in the words of my text, *He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God*, ver. 28, 29. As if he had said, Every one that is born a Jew, and is circumcised, and, as far as the outward characters and badges of Judaism go, can make a fair title to the promises of God, is not therefore a true Jew, is not therefore a son of Abraham, to whom the benefits of God's covenant do appertain; nor is that the true, available circumcision which is

external, that mark which is imprinted on the flesh: but he is the Jew, the *Israelite indeed*, the *true child of Abraham*, who shall be accepted of God, though he be not so by birth; who, in the purity and integrity of his heart, yields obedience to those eternal and substantial laws of holiness and righteousness which God gave to the Jews: and the true circumcision, that will stand one in stead, is that of him who cuts off all superfluities and pollutions that are spiritual; who hath that law of righteousness, of which circumcision is the sign and seal, imprinted on his inner man, his soul and spirit: not he who hath obeyed it in the letter only, by being circumcised outwardly in his flesh. In a word, the true Israelite is one, *whose praise is not of men, but of God*; who aims at more in his profession of religion, than barely the entitling himself to the favour and countenance and outward privileges which that profession may procure him among men; for he makes it his main business to approve himself to God by a serious endeavour in thought and word and deed to observe his holy commandments.

Thus I have given you a plain account of St. Paul's discourse in this chapter, and of the sense and meaning of the words of my text.

But it may be said, What doth all this concern us? we are neither Jews nor Gentiles, but Christians, and therefore have nothing to do with what the apostle here discourseth concerning them.

I answer, Though the apostle here particularly addresseth his discourse to the Jews, yet the reason of his words is of eternal truth in all religions, and doth concern us as well as them. For do but change the word *Jew* in the text into that of *Christian*, and

the term of *circumcision* into that of *baptism*, and those other outward duties and privileges which we (and yet not without great reason) do set so high a value upon, and the text will fit us at this day, as well as those persons to whom St. Paul did immediately direct his discourse. The truth is, it is to be feared that many of us Christians do approach too near to the Jews at that time in our notions of religion, and think ourselves true disciples of Christ, and to have a right to all the promises of the Gospel, upon the same or no better grounds, than those Jews that St. Paul here disputes against, thought themselves the children of Abraham, and entitled to all the benefits of that covenant which was made with him. For as they believed themselves secure of God's favour and acceptance merely because they were Jews outwardly, that is, had all the external visible characters of Judaism upon them; so do we too often presume upon an outward Christianity, which how speciously soever it looks, nay, though we ourselves are imposed upon by it, (as thinking it will serve all our ends,) yet is it indeed rather *in the flesh, than in the spirit; and the praise of it is more of men, than of God.*

It will, I hope, be worth the while to run over the several heads or instances of this outward Judaism, the particulars that the Jews in St. Paul's time rested so much upon: and to see how exactly the principles of many men's Christianity among us do answer to them. For from this it will appear how much we are concerned to have a care of such principles, and to take other kinds of measures of religion; unless we mean to be content with the shadow of it instead of the substance, and will build

our hopes of heaven upon an airy and fantastic foundation.

I. I begin with that branch of outward Judaism which St. Paul doth so much insist on, viz. *their placing their confidence in being the natural seed of Abraham, and being circumcised, and having the true religion and worship of God among them.* Which privileges gave them so great an opinion of themselves, that they despised all the world besides; nay, they verily thought, that in virtue of those outward advantages they should certainly be saved, let them lead what lives they would. It was a known maxim among them, and is still extant in their books, that every Israelite, if he continue so to his life's end, hath his portion in the kingdom of God. Nothing but apostasy from the faith could deprive him of it. So great a value they thought God had for the merits of their father Abraham, that for his sake he would not suffer any of his seed to perish, (meaning that seed which was promised by Isaac and Jacob.) And it is this notion of theirs that St. John Baptist doth refer to, and tacitly reprove in that speech of his to the Jews, when they came to his baptism; *Bring forth, says he, fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father.* (They thought that that alone would preserve them from the wrath to come.) No, says he, *for God is able even of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham,* Matt. iii. 8, 9.

But now, though one would think this should be so groundless a presumption, that none but a conceited Jew should be guilty of it, yet, in truth, do many among us support ourselves, and build our

hopes of God's favours upon the very same or no better a foundation. I pray what great difference is there (I speak as to the inward virtue or merits of the thing) between being natural born Jews and children of Abraham, and being born of Christian parents? between an outward circumcision and an outward baptism? between an external profession of the law of God given by Moses, and an external profession of the gospel of Christ? And yet are there not too many of us that hope and expect to be saved merely on account of these things? Ask several persons upon what it is that they ground the hopes of God's favour, and what title they can plead to the pardon of their sins; why, the best answer they can make is, they thank God they are not infidels, but born and bred in a Christian country; they were baptized into Christ, and are members of an orthodox church, where religion is professed in its purity, and they have never departed from this profession, but believe as their teachers would have them; and therefore they doubt not of a right to all those promises that Christ hath made to his church.

Far am I here from denying, much more from slighting or undervaluing the great advantages of being born and educated in such a country as ours. I own with all my heart, not only the expediency, but also the absolute necessity of baptism, and a visible profession of the Christian religion. These are things without which we cannot be saved in an ordinary way. And I bless God most unfeignedly, and so, I hope, do we all, for the unspeakable mercy he hath vouchsafed to us of this kingdom, in having the gospel of Christ and the worship of God more purely taught and more sincerely administered

among us, than in most parts of Christendom; and therefore infinite are our blessings and privileges above what the heathen world hath any notion of. But then for any of us to rest upon these things, and to think ourselves good Christians and heirs of salvation, because it is our lot to be born and educated in such happy circumstances, without taking any care ourselves to make a good use of them, is just the folly of a man that, being born to a good estate, riotously spends it all, and yet thinks to die rich. Happy are we that we were baptized in our infancy, and trained up to the profession of a holy religion. And woe be to us if we trifle away these mercies of God, and abuse that grace which was given us for our improvement in all Christian virtues, to the purpose only of a vain presumption of God's favour, without contributing our most earnest endeavours to our being qualified for it. Baptism, and the profession of an holy religion, are most unspeakable blessings; but yet they were not granted us, or required of us for themselves, or that we should rest upon them alone, but for further ends, viz. that we might be obliged hereby to forsake the Devil and all his works, the vanities of the world, and the sinful lusts of the flesh, and follow the example of our Lord, into whose discipline we were baptized, by dying daily to sin, and living unto righteousness. If we do not make this use of our baptism and visible profession, they will signify nothing at all to us. To conclude this head, we may truly say of these things what St. Paul here in this chapter said of circumcision, and those other Jewish privileges that he is here talking of, viz. that *they do verily profit, if thou keep the law of Christ: but if thou*

be a transgressor of that law, thy baptism is no baptism, thy Christianity is no better than heathenism. For he is not a Christian, that is one outwardly; neither is that baptism, which is outward upon the flesh: but he is a Christian, that is one inwardly; and baptism is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not only that according to the letter of the gospel.

II. Another principle of outward Judaism, (as I may call it,) in which the Pharisees and other Jews in St. Paul's time were apt to rest, (and which was indeed a degree higher than the former instance I mentioned,) was *their being skilful in the knowledge of their law*. This our apostle in this chapter takes notice of, when, reckoning up those things that the Jews had so great a value for in themselves, he names their *having a form of knowledge, and being able to be guides of the blind, and instructors of the ignorant, and teachers of babes*, ver. 19, 20. And, indeed, such was the genius of that people at that time, that by how much any of them did exceed in knowledge and skilfulness about the mysteries of their law and the traditions of their forefathers, by so much the better Jews they took themselves to be, and the more acceptable to God; and by so much the more they despised their neighbours that were inferior to them in this kind of knowledge. And hence came that great conceit the Pharisees and Scribes had of themselves, and the great contempt that, upon all occasions, they expressed of others: *This people*, say they, *that knoweth not the law are cursed*, as you find them speaking in St. John's Gospel, chap. vii. 49. Hence it came, that instead of practising the law in their lives, their

whole study was taken up in speculations about it, in finding out subtleties and mysteries and curiosities that were above the capacities of ordinary persons; in which matter we have at this day extant in their writings abundance of instances of their diligence.

And are there not just such a sort of Christians among us? are there not some in our days that make Christianity little more than a business of mere speculation, or a set of orthodox opinions, or a more than ordinary knowledge of the mysteries of God? are there not too many, who read the word of God indeed, nay, and perhaps with a great deal of care, if not niceness and curiosity, but yet by no means with an intent to better their lives thereby, by no means to regulate their judgments in any points of faith, or their manners in any points of practice; but merely for the confirming them in some notion they have taken up, or the establishing some doctrine that the party they are engaged in are obliged to maintain? Others, I am afraid, may study the scriptures to another purpose, which is altogether as unaccountable; that is to say, merely for the sake of the phrase and language they there meet with; which, when they are well acquainted with, they do so wretchedly misapply in their religious talk, that, in truth, what is admirable sense and reason in the holy books, is little better than jargon and cant when it comes out of their mouths. With these men, to be a good Christian is to be able to dispute learnedly about articles of faith, and to be wonderfully orthodox in their opinions, and to have so great a knowledge in the points that are now controverted among Christians, that they can enter the lists for the cause

they have espoused against any adversary that opposes them. With others of them, Christianity runs much lower, for it is but talking warmly and zealously in scripture phrase and language about matters they never gave themselves much trouble to understand; and then who can doubt of their love to God, and their zeal for Jesus Christ?

The men that have these talents are apt to think meanly enough of those that have them not. Those plain, simple Christians, that heartily believe their creed, and endeavour to live honestly among their neighbours, and serve God as well as they can, but yet trouble not themselves with those high points of speculation, nor with the divisions of Christendom; this sort of men (God help them) are, in their opinion, but poor, weak Christians, too much under the dispensation of morality, and not yet arrived to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But sure this sort of principles, and these notions of religion, wherever they are found, are but a branch of the old Pharisaism. These kind of men that I have described, how knowing soever they are in the mysteries of God, are but Jews, I should say, *Christians outwardly, and their praise is of men, and not of God.* The true inward Christianity sinks down into the heart, is a vital principle there of all holy and good actions, makes a man a new creature, and subdues every thing in him that speaks opposition to the holy discipline of our Lord Jesus; but was never intended to flutter above in the brain, and to fill his head with notions and speculations, and there to leave him, with his affections and inclinations, as deeply engaged to the world and the flesh and the Devil as ever they were before. O this is the worst

representation of Christianity that can be! *They are not the hearers of the law*, says St. Paul, *but the doers of it, that shall be justified*, Rom. ii. 13. And, *If you know these things*, says our Saviour, *happy are ye if ye do them*, John xiii. 17. And whatever knowledge of Christ any of us may pretend to above our neighbours, yet *hereby*, says St. John, *we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments*. But *he that saith, he knows him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*. 1 Ep. ii. 3, 4.

III. Another piece of outward Judaism, which the scripture often takes notice of, was, *the having an extraordinary zeal for things that were in themselves indifferent, and were not commanded of God; and making it a weighty point of religion to observe or abstain from those things*. The Jews, and especially the Pharisees, placed a great deal of their religion in these matters; *They loved their own traditions*, as our Saviour tells us, *more than God's commandments*, Mark vii. 7, 8, 9. What a world of stir and bustle did they make about their phylacteries! (which were certain scrolls of parchment, with certain texts of scripture written upon them, that they tied upon their foreheads whenever they said their prayers.) There was no law of God for them; (unless they forced some proverbial, allegorical expression in the law to speak a literal sense, which was not intended;) but yet, as our Saviour reproves them, they were abundantly more careful to have those phylacteries about them, tied on their heads, than to have the law of God written upon their hearts.

What a matter of conscience did they make of

cleansing cups and platters, and washing their hands before meat ! Insomuch, as the text tells us, *they marvelled to see our Saviour and his disciples to sit down to meat with unwashed hands*, Matt. xv. 1. Mark vii. 2. And abundance of other instances there is to be given of their zeal in matters of this nature.

We now, that are Christians, and know better things, are apt enough to deride the foolish superstitions of those people in those days : but are not we ourselves, many of us, as foolishly superstitious ? If we will go over to our neighbour nations, where the popish religion is professed, we shall there see instances in abundance, transcending, I verily believe, the very height of the Pharisaic superstition. Good Lord ! what stress is there laid upon the adoring the cross of our Lord, and resorting to the images of our Lady, and other saints ! and, which is wonderful, all crosses and all images are not of like virtue, but some better serve the necessities of devout adorers than others do ! What a meritorious thing is it to say so many Ave Maria's, and so many Lord's Prayers every day, according to the number of their string of beads ! what a security do they account a slight penance and the priest's absolution, against all the malignity and guilt of their most mortal sins ! How safe do they think they are from danger, if they have any relics or consecrated things about them ! nay, in the very point of death, an indulgence purchased with their money, or a putting on the habit of some religious brother, to the patron of whose society they have devoted themselves, is such a mighty comfort that they can die in peace !

What is superstition, if this be not ? Is not this plainly to place religion in voluntary and uncom-

manded performances? Pray wherein do these sorts of things exceed the Pharisees' phylacteries, or their washing of hands, or cleansing of cups and platters?

But are not some among ourselves guilty of this Pharisaism, as well as our neighbours? I would to God we would lay this matter to heart. We all pretend to hate superstition extremely: God give us all grace to hate it more, for it is an ill thing wherever it is found. But, in good earnest, is it not as great a piece of superstition to make it a matter of religion and conscience to forbear the use of an indifferent thing when God hath not forbid the use of it, as it is to make it a matter of religion and conscience to use an indifferent thing when God hath not commanded it? I dare say every one living will be satisfied that there is no difference between these cases, as to the matter of superstition.

But now, if this be so, what must we say of all those persons that refuse communion with us, as to our prayers and our sacraments, merely upon this account, that there are some things in our worship that are not commanded by God, though yet they cannot deny but that they are indifferent in themselves, and that they are commanded by the laws of the land. Let those that are concerned apply this to themselves: and, on the other side, I will say this to those of our communion, If any of them think to recommend themselves to God, merely by a conformity to the gestures and habits and forms prescribed by the church in the worship of God, without any inward devotion, or a serious endeavour after a thorough sanctification of body and soul and spirit, they are as much devoid of the life of God, as much outward

hypocritical professors, Jews or Christians, call them which you will, as any I have now represented.

But there is another sort of people among us that ought not to be forgotten, when we are mentioning this Pharisaical principle of placing religion in things wherein God hath not interposed his command: there are, we know, some among us, that distinguish themselves from the neighbourhood by a particular way of their own, both in their habit, in their speech, in their gestures, in their way of address, in all their conversation. You will easily guess what sort of people I mean. And these singularities they take up upon account of conscience, and place some religion in them. Now, if it be so, (and if it be not so, why do not they leave these ridiculous practices?) I say, if it be so, where is the difference between them and the papists, nay, and the Pharisees, as to this point? How is their *yea* and *nay*, their refusal of the hat, and twenty such like things, more excusable than the papists' holy water and crosses and pilgrimages, or in the Pharisees' phylacteries, and *praying in the corners of the streets*?

The sum of all this head is this; that let us be of what religion, what communion we will, yet, if we can give no better evidence of our sincerity, than it was only a zealous practice or forbearance of indifferent things, we are but under the character that is here given in my text, of being *Jews or Christians outwardly; and our praise is more of men, than of God.*

IV. Another branch of outward Judaism was, a greater zeal for rituals and ceremonials, though of God's own appointment, than for the moral duties of the law. This was a main point of the Jewish

falsely-pretended religion in those days, and occasioned many excellent discourses, both of the prophets and of our Saviour and of the apostles. Very punctual they were in observing all the positive, ceremonial precepts of the law concerning the worship of God. But, thinking these things to be sufficient to make compensation for all other licentious practices they might indulge themselves in, they took no care to observe those laws that were of inward, substantial goodness. They *tithed mint and cummin*, which things, as our Saviour saith, *they ought to do*, as being commanded by the law; but they made no conscience of *justice and mercy and faith: which things they ought much rather to have done*, Matt. xxiii. 23. They were very frequent in fasting and praying: pray they did in *the very corners of the streets*, Matt. vi. 5. And the Pharisee, that our Saviour mentions, *fasted twice a week*, Luke xviii. 12; which, to be sure, was there set down for an imitation of the practice of that religious sort of men. But yet in their prayers *they honoured God with their lips, when their hearts were far from him*, Matt. xv. 8. And in their fasts *they did not cease from their works of violence and iniquity*, as the prophet testifies against them. They were zealous observers of the sabbath, but did not *rest* from their *wicked works*. They were very free to *offer sacrifices to God of their herd, and of their flock, even till he declared that he was cloyed with them, and his soul hated them*. But they were not so free to offer to him their inward man, their hearts and spirits, which was the only sacrifice he delighted in.

Now I heartily wish it were well considered, whe-

ther we also at this day do not frequently thus play the Jews with God Almighty. I fear there is some reason to believe that a great many of us are leavened with those very principles and notions of religion; I mean, that we are very zealous for, and lay a mighty stress upon those duties that concern the outward worship of God, but are not proportionably zealous for the inward, spiritual acts of piety, (that heavenly frame and temper of mind that can alone recommend us to God,) nor for the duties that are next under it; I mean, that universal righteousness, goodness, and charity that is due to our fellow-creatures. Hath not the world experience of some, who would not for any consideration swear an oath in their ordinary conversation, (and in that they are highly to be commended,) that yet will make no scruple of using very indirect arts for the promoting their own interests, (I will call it by no heavier a name,) when they have a fair opportunity offered them? There are those, who are very strict in keeping the Lord's day, and attending the public ordinances of that day; but yet they are not so strict in keeping faith and trust, and preserving their minds from all inward pollutions of worldliness and sensuality. It is not unusual to find those men in the world that do at solemn times receive the sacrament with as great devotion as is possible, (and that is the most serious and solemn act of our worship,) and yet, within a very little time after (perchance upon the first temptation) return to the same sins they religiously vowed against, and so continue on in that course of life.

In naming of these things, I reflect upon no particular person in the world; for I am sure I think of

none, and therefore can mean none. But, I doubt, the matter of fact is true as to all those particulars, and therefore what must we say of the persons that are concerned in it? I dare not say that such persons are hypocrites in the usual sense of the word, because it is very probable they do not perform those duties merely for a show, but are in good earnest, and verily believe that these things alone are sufficient to the attaining of God's favour, and the entitling them to the pardon of their sins, and everlasting happiness in the world to come; though they continue to indulge themselves in such wicked, sinful practices, as their own consciences cannot but continually smite and reprove and condemn them for: such notions men may have got concerning religion, and the terms of salvation offered by Jesus Christ in his gospel. But though I will not call them hypocrites, that is to say, dissemblers either with God or man, yet I think we ought to call them outward, pharisaical Christians, that are utterly devoid of the life and spirit of that religion they do profess. I do not blame them, but commend them, for the performing those duties that they do; and, I believe, if they had not this respect for the outward worship of God, they would in a little time grow extravagantly and enormously wicked. But yet they are exceedingly to be blamed, (and if they do not amend their lives, they will blame themselves to all eternity,) in that, to their outward services they pay to God, they do not add an entire resignation of the inward man, their whole souls and spirits, to be absolutely ruled and governed by those laws of purity and holiness that are prescribed to them in the gospel. Without this entire devotion of our whole selves to God, all

our services will be little better than hypocrisy : but with it all our frailties and faults and infirmities, how many soever they be, will be forgiven us ; and, notwithstanding them, we shall find favour with our heavenly Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus I have given you an account of the outward Jew that St. Paul speaks of, and shewed you how very much many of our Christian professors do resemble him in their principles and practices ; which was the thing I proposed.

And now it will be very needless to enter into a description of the person that St. Paul in the text opposeth to him, *a Jew inwardly, whose circumcision is that of the heart, and whose praise is not of men, but of God*. For we may easily form a notion of such a person by what has been said of the other. Let us but affix the directly contrary qualities to him, and then we have his character. However, to save you the trouble of collecting it, I will give you the heads of those things that go to the making up his description.

1. First of all, the inward Jew, or he that is such an Israelite as our Saviour speaks of, *an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile*, John i. 47 ; or, to speak in our own language, a true disciple of Christ ; he is, I say, a person who is so far from vaunting himself, or resting in the outward privileges he enjoys, that he draws from hence an argument of *working out his salvation with greater fear and trembling*, knowing that by how much the greater advantages he enjoys above others, by so much the greater obligations are laid upon him to outstrip them in virtue and holiness : so as that, if he do not improve those mercies and favours of

God to the right purposes, he is in a worse condition than those who never had them.

2. Secondly, he is a person tractable and docible ; one that hath quitted his mind of all its sinful prejudices and prepossessions, so that he is always prepared to receive and entertain any truth of God, though conveyed to him by mean instruments, and though never so disagreeable to his sensual delights and interests.

3. Thirdly, he is a person that doth not overvalue some duties and lessen others, but gives every duty to God its due and just place in his esteem, preferring inward acts of piety before the outward service of God, yet not omitting that ; and so ordering his devotions towards God, that they are instrumental to, and great promoters of the duties he owes to his neighbour.

4. Fourthly, he is a person who endeavours to yield an universal obedience to the laws of God, not picking and choosing out of them those to observe that are easiest, and least repugnant to his nature and interests, and laying less stress upon the rest ; but doing what he can to observe them all : not contenting himself only to observe them in his outward actions, but endeavouring to bring his mind and spirit to a conformity with them, labouring to regulate his thoughts, desires, and appetites by them, as well as his conversation.

5. Fifthly, he is a person that seeks not, designs not the praise of men in any thing he doth, but hath a mighty care to approve himself to God. It is the conscience of his duty that is the great spring and principle from whence his actions proceed, and the hinge on which they turn. So that he is always of

a piece, always like himself; as religious and devout in private as in public; as careful of himself and his actions when nobody sees him, as when he hath many spectators and observers of his carriage.

6. Sixthly and lastly, he is a person that, when he hath done all, is yet humble and lowly in his own eyes, not pretending to merit any thing at the hand of God. On the contrary, *if he had done his whole duty, all that God hath required of him*, (which yet he is far from being so vain as to think he hath,) yet he is sensible that still he is an *unprofitable servant*; he hath done God no good, *he hath only done what he ought to do*, Luke xvii. 10. And therefore far be it from him to think he deserves any thing at the hands of God; nay, he rather desires to lay down in the dust, and, from the bottom of his heart, to ascribe all that he hath, and all that he is, and all that he hopes for, to his sole grace, favour, and goodness, crying out with holy David, *Not unto me, Lord, not unto me, but unto thy holy name be the praise and the glory of all*, Psalm cxv. 1.

He that hath these characters upon him is certainly an Israelite indeed, a true Nathanael, one that is beloved of God, and shall inherit the promises both of this life and that which is to come. Now that we may all be such, and consequently be so happy, God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

A SERMON

ON

ACTS XIII. 48.

— *and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*

THIS text having some affinity with those I have lately been upon, as to the argument of it, and it being likewise commonly misunderstood, I thought it would not be unacceptable to have a fair account given of it: and I am the more desirous to do it, because several useful things offer themselves from it.

You find, in the 14th verse of this chapter, that St. Paul and his company being come to Antioch in Pisidia, he went, as it was his custom, into the synagogue on the sabbath day; where both Jews and Gentiles were gathered together. There he preached a sermon to them, to persuade to the belief of Christ Jesus, whom, by undeniable arguments, he proved to be that Messias whom God had promised to the fathers, and by whom only remission of sins and everlasting salvation was to be had. This sermon of his is set down in this chapter, from ver. 16. to 42.

What the effect of this sermon was, you have in the 42d verse, namely, that, when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath day.

But here comes a question, which I ought to answer before I go on any further with the story. How comes it to pass that we find here both Jews and

Gentiles worshipping God in one synagogue, and that too in an heathen country, as Pisidia was? nay, it seems, by this place, it was their constant practice so to do every sabbath day.

In answer to this, you must know, that in the time of our Saviour and his apostles, the Jews, though they still kept their own land, yet abundance of that nation had transplanted themselves into other countries; nay, most of the great cities were then full of them; and wherever they came they erected synagogues for the worship of God. And then, as for the Gentiles joining with them in that worship, you are not by these Gentiles to understand the common sort of heathens, or Gentiles who were idolaters, for with such the Jews would have nothing to do, no more than they would have to do with the Jews. But it so happened always, that by conversation with the Jews, wherever they came, and by the means of those excellent notions about religion that they could furnish men with out of their law, a great many of the more ingenuous sort of the Gentiles were brought from their idolatry to the owning and worship of the one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and likewise to the belief of a future life: and all such as these the Jews accounted in the number of proselytes, and were glad to have them come to their synagogues; where, besides joining in the true worship of God, they had the benefit of hearing the law and the prophets read every sabbath day; which very thing would strongly dispose them to believe in Christ's doctrine, whenever it should be made known to them.

For the fuller understanding of this, you are to know that there were two sorts of proselytes among

the Jews; some that were strictly so called, and some that were called so in a larger sense. The proselytes, in the more strict sense, were all those Gentiles that were so far persuaded of the truth of Moses's law, and the privileges it did entitle them to, that they entirely entered themselves into that covenant, becoming circumcised, and obliging themselves to observe all the laws of Moses. Now these proselytes were in all respects accounted as natural-born Jews; and these were called *proselytes of the covenant*. But there were but few of this sort. The proselytes in a larger sense were those that so far joined with the Jews, as to worship the one supreme God, and to frame their lives according to the laws of nature, which were delivered by God to the children of Adam and Noah, though yet they never circumcised themselves, nor entered into the Mosaical covenant. For by the laws of God in the Old Testament, all people that would come thus far were allowed to live among the Jews, and to worship God with them; nay, and in the very temple they had a place appointed them to worship God in, which was called *the court of the Gentiles*; and these are those that are so often mentioned in the Old Testament by the name of *the strangers* among them; as particularly in the fourth commandment, where God having ordered that they should do no manner of work on the sabbath day, he adds, *Neither thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gate*: from which expression the Jews used to call this latter sort of proselytes by the name of *the proselytes of the gate*, as they did the former by the name of *the proselytes of the covenant*.

Now this latter sort of proselytes continued Gentiles still, notwithstanding their being proselytes ; and of this sort there was always a great number, both in Judæa and in all other countries where the Jews came to inhabit. Of this sort, for instance, was the centurion in the Gospel, of whom the Jews said, that he loved their nation, and had built them a synagogue, Of this sort likewise was Cornelius, a Roman captain in Cæsarea, who is called *a devout man, and one that feared God, with all his house*. Of this sort again was Lydia, *the seller of purple in Thyatira*, who is said to be *a worshipper of God*. In a word, wherever in the Acts of the Apostles you meet with *devout persons*, or *devout Greeks*, or *worshipping Greeks*, you are always by those expressions to understand those Gentile proselytes we are now speaking of ; and that the Gentiles here mentioned in the 42d verse of this chapter I am now upon were of this sort, is abundantly evident from the next (43d) verse, where those that are called *Gentiles* in the former verse are called *religious proselytes*, or rather it ought to be rendered *worshipping proselytes*, in this verse.

Having now thus cleared this difficulty, let us go on with the story. The Gentiles having desired St. Paul to preach on the same argument the next sabbath day ; when that day came, as appears in the 44th verse, *almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God*. But then it follows in the 45th verse, that *when the Jews saw the multitude, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming*. Upon this it follows in the next verse, that *then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God*

should first have been spoken to you : but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo ! we turn to the Gentiles. Exactly did the apostles here obey their orders ; for, by Christ's commission, they were first in every place to preach the gospel to the Jews, and afterward to the Gentiles ; and for this St. Paul vouches a sufficient warrant out of the Old Testament, as you may see in the next (47th) verse.

But what came of all this ? why that follows in the 48th verse : *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord : and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed :* this was the effect of St. Paul's second sermon.

He preached to the Jews, and endeavoured to convince them, out of Moses and the Prophets, that Jesus Christ was the Saviour of the world. But they made light of this, and judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. Upon this he turns to the Gentiles, and they were very glad of the good news, and embraced it heartily, and glorified God for it ; *and accordingly as many among them as were ordained to eternal life believed.*

This is the history of my text, as it lies in the chapter. Let us now examine what is the true meaning of these last words of it ; *as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.* The sense that many of us, when we hear these words, are apt to pitch upon, is this ; that all those in that city that were particularly and by name decreed and elected by God from all eternity to everlasting life, all those did, upon St. Paul's preaching, believe the gospel.

I do not here pretend to dispute the doctrine of particular election ; I account it an arrogant thing

to meddle with those secrets. God may, or may not, have ordained particular persons to eternal life, for any thing that we can say on either side : this therefore I do not meddle with : all that I say is this, that whatever God hath done in this matter, yet this text doth not speak any thing of it. So far from that, that there are unanswerable proofs to be given that it relates to a quite different purpose : two things I will here offer.

First of all, let it be considered that the word that is here used will not well bear such a signification. The word is *τεταγμένοι* : we render it *ordained*. But if by *ordaining* we mean predestinating from all eternity, it is certain the word hath no such signification either in scripture or any other author. The proper English of it is, *ordered, commanded, appointed, put in battle array, prepared, disposed, set in readiness*. Any of these words doth express its sense : but nowhere (as the critics do observe) is it used to express any eternal decree of God.

The scripture always makes use of other words for that business. Besides, if we should be willing to take this word in that sense in this text, though it be nowhere else taken so, yet there is a main thing wanting to make it capable of that sense, for God is not here mentioned. It is not said, *as many as were ordained of God to eternal life believed* ; which certainly had been necessary, if St. Luke had meant that this ordination was of God ; for otherwise men could not have thought of a decree of God in this place, considering that the word imports no such thing. But it is only said simply, *as many as were* *τεταγμένοι* ; from whence it is plain, that we are left to the common, usual sense of that word.

This is the first thing. In the second place, if St. Luke be supposed in the text to have spoken of any particular election of persons to salvation, then his words must carry this sense; That of those who heard St. Paul preach at that time, as many of them as were from all eternity decreed to everlasting salvation, all those did, at that time, believe in Jesus Christ. This, I say, according to this interpretation, must be the sense: but now see what abundance of absurdities will follow upon this interpretation of his words.

In the first place, by admitting this sense, you suppose that all those that heard St. Paul's sermon, and did not at that time become converts to Christianity, were reprobates; for if all those that were predestinated to eternal life did then believe, all those that did not then believe were reprobates. But now this doctrine seems quite different from the doctrine of the gospel; for that tells us, that all men are not called at once, but some at one time, and some at another. And I do not doubt but that several of those that then heard St. Paul, and were not convinced by his sermon, might afterwards, upon further consideration, and further instruction, and hearing St. Paul preach again upon the same argument, at last become Christians, though they did not believe at the first.

In the second place, there is this absurdity follows likewise upon this interpretation, that it supposeth all those that then believed, upon St. Paul's preaching, were eternally saved; for certainly if they were particularly elected to eternal life, they could not miscarry. But now this seems likewise very different from the sense of the gospel; for Christ

hath told us, that *many are called, but few are chosen*: that is, a great many may give in their names to Christ, and take upon them the profession of his religion; but few are those that do approve themselves true, sincere, choice Christians, such as shall be thought worthy of eternal life. It is too much to say (I am sure it is more than we can prove) that all those that believed the gospel upon St. Paul's preaching did infallibly go to heaven. It is probable there might be several among them, that, though they then believed, yet either did not persevere, or did not bring forth the fruits of the gospel in an holy and pure life. Now if there was but one man in all the company that fell under this censure, it quite destroys that interpretation of the text we are now speaking of.

But, in the third place, I urge this: St. Luke, that wrote this History of the Acts of the Apostles, tells us here, that upon such a sermon that St. Paul made, all that *were ordained to eternal life believed*. We now would expound his words, that all that were predestinated to eternal life believed. The thing I ask now is, whether, according to this exposition, we do not make St. Luke to say a great deal more than he knew? For how could he pronounce (though we suppose him present at the making of the converts) that all those particular persons, that were then convinced by St. Paul's doctrine, should infallibly be saved; and all the rest of the hearers, that were not then converted, should be infallibly damned? Sure he could not pretend to know any thing of this; for we have reason to believe that he knew no more about the final condition of particular men than the apostles of our Lord did. And yet

none of them pretended to make any such judgment concerning the particular converts that came in to them. For the election of God concerning particular persons (if there be any such) is only known to God. The conclusion therefore is, that it is extremely improbable, if not impossible, that St. Luke should mean any such thing as we would fasten upon his words.

But what then is the meaning of his words? *As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.* Why, to that I say, the whole thing depends upon the translation of one word, and that, as I told you, is τεταγμένοι: we render it *ordained*; but our translators, if they had pleased, might have pitched upon three or four other words that would better have expressed the signification of it, and have cleared the sense beyond all exception. This word, if you will consult the usage of it in authors, cannot be more naturally rendered than *fitted*, or *prepared*, or *set in order*, or *disposed for*. Take now any one of these renderings, and it will fully hit the sense of my text, and avoid all those absurdities that I have been speaking of. The case before us is this; The Jews put away the gospel from them, and judged themselves unworthy of eternal life: the Gentiles, on the contrary, glorified God for the good news that eternal life shall be offered to them; and accordingly, as St. Luke here tells you, as many of those Gentiles as had fitted and prepared themselves, or were set in order, or disposed for eternal life, all these did, upon St. Paul's preaching, believe the gospel, and became Christians. If you remember, in the ninth of St. Luke, our Saviour speaks of some persons that were not fit for the kingdom of

God; and such would not believe in him: but now these people were fit for the kingdom of God, and therefore they did embrace the gospel as soon as ever they heard of it.

This now, I dare venture to say, is a natural, easy exposition of this difficult text; and that which, if you will stand to the judgment of the most learned expositors, is the only true meaning of it. But here is nothing in all this of any eternal decree of God concerning any particular man's salvation, (nor indeed was there any reason to expect it,) which was the thing to be proved.

Having thus given you a full account of this text, I now come to draw some inferences from it by way of application. And the first thing you may take notice of from hence is this, that all men are not equally prepared and disposed for eternal life; for you see plainly by this text, that some were unworthy of eternal life, and others were fitted and disposed for it. If you ask a reason of this difference in men, the text will thus far give you it, that this difference in men, as to their fitness and unfitness for eternal life, doth not proceed from any decree of God concerning them, but purely from their own voluntary management of themselves. Those that are here pronounced unworthy of eternal life, it is not said of them, that God had made them so, or that he had decreed them to be so, but that they made themselves unworthy; and by parity of reason we may say the same thing of those that were prepared for eternal life: they, by well improving that grace which God had already given them, had made themselves fit and qualified for the receiving any further discoveries of God to them that should

direct them to eternal life. All our fitness or unfitness for the kingdom of heaven, as far as we can learn from the scriptures, depends wholly upon this single point of our using or not using our natural powers, and that further grace and opportunities he bestows upon us, to the right purposes that we are in our own consciences convinced we ought to use them to. Whosoever doth heartily endeavour with an honest mind to approve himself to God, by observing all those things which, by the present light he hath, he judges to be his duty, every such man is fitted and prepared for the kingdom of God. But whosoever espouseth any interest contrary to his conscience, or engages himself in any course of vice or wickedness contrary to his known duty, every such man doth put away the grace of God from him, and renders himself unworthy of the kingdom of God.

In the second place, another thing I observe from these words is this; that all those that are fitted and prepared for eternal life will certainly embrace the gospel, and become Christians, whenever that gospel is fairly proposed to them; *as many*, saith the text, *as were set in order for eternal life believed*. God Almighty never meant to deliver such a gospel to mankind, as that all indiscriminately, both good and bad, should be equally capable of perceiving the evidence of it, and being persuaded by the motives that it offered. This would have been to overrule men's wills, and to have made faith not to be a virtue, but a mathematical science. But God so ordered things, that there should be sufficient evidence for the truth of his gospel to all good men: but yet not such evidence as would convince those that were obstinately

bad. And this is that which our Saviour hath often occasion to mention in his discourses. He tells us of some that could not believe; and he gives us the reason why they could not, because they were slaves to lust and passion and interest. But he delivers it as a general proposition, (John vii. 17.) that whosoever will sincerely apply himself to do God's will as far as he knows it, every such man shall certainly be convinced of the truth of his doctrine, that it is from God. And to this purpose is that famous parable of his, which is recorded by no less than three of the evangelists, concerning the sower that went out to sow good seed in his ground. The sum of that parable is this; That though the good seed of the gospel was sown upon all sorts of ground, yet it took root in none but in the good ground; that that was prepared beforehand for the receiving of it: but wherever the seed was sown in that sort of ground, there it brought forth in some twenty, in some thirty, in others an hundredfold.

And therefore, in the third place, to observe this further, we may be fairly enabled from hence to give a reason why there are so many unbelievers and infidels among us at this day. If we find several among us that make light of the Christian religion, and talk contemptibly of our Saviour and his doctrines, as, God knows, there are such as these to be met with, what are you to conclude from hence? that there is no reason, no argument, no evidence to be offered for Christianity, because these men, who are acknowledged to be men of wit and parts, make it their business to run it down? This is that indeed they bear you in hand with; but it is the falsest conclusion in the world. Alas! you are much

mistaken in your men; they never much applied their heads to examine these things. They have, perhaps, got out of some lewd books, and from their lewder company, some commonplace heads, with which they think they can disparage Christianity, and it is likely they have wit enough to set off those things to advantage: but as for serious thinking and putting things together, and making a solemn judgment of what is true or false in those matters, as in the presence of God, and as in a business wherein their everlasting salvation or damnation doth depend; I say, as for this, you may assure yourselves these men never did it, nor are capable of doing it; it is not in their natures to give themselves so much trouble (such a fatigue, as they will call it) as such a work will require, and therefore you may be sure that their infidelity doth not proceed from any real want of evidence or arguments for the truth of the Christian religion, but from this, that these men have so wretchedly abused their faculties by debauchery and ill practices, that they have made themselves unworthy of eternal life, as St. Luke here expresseth it.

And the truth of this I am so confident of, that I dare appeal to you all about it. Did any of you ever in your lives know a man amongst us that had the confidence to assert that he believed nothing of Christ's religion, that you did in your consciences believe to be a serious and virtuous man? Have you ever known any man that made it his business to live virtuously and soberly and godly in all his conversation, according to the methods that the light of nature would teach him; I say, can you name that man in all this nation that thus feared God, and

made a conscience of all his actions, that was not a sincere believer in Jesus Christ? I dare say such a man is not within the compass of your knowledge. And if it be so, (as I am confident it is,) that unbelief that is found among us is not to be imputed either to the want of proof of the Christian religion among us, or to any decree of God that hath passed upon those unbelievers, but merely to their ill-managing themselves, and their being preengaged in obstinate habits of vice and wickedness.

In the fourth place, from what I have delivered about this text, we may be able to give a fair and rational account of the quick spreading of the gospel throughout the world upon the apostles' preaching of it. It may appear a wonder that the pagan nations should so readily embrace the gospel when it was first preached to them, as we find they did, when yet they had been bred up in a way so directly contrary to it. Undoubtedly there was the hand of God in this. But God usually brings his own great works to pass in the ordinary methods of nature; and there was something of that here. For so had the divine providence ordered the matter, that the minds of the Gentiles had by degrees been prepared for the reception of the gospel at the time when the apostles were sent to preach it. So that there was not such a leap from their paganism to Christianity as one would at first imagine. For thus stood the case; it pleased God, in the latter end of the Jewish commonwealth, to suffer the Gentiles to break in upon them. They first became a prey to the Babylonians; afterwards to the Greeks. While they were under the Greeks, their scriptures, which had been before locked up in the Hebrew tongue, were trans-

lated into Greek, which was then the universal language. After this, about forty years before our Saviour, they were conquered by the Romans, and then they became a Roman province. Now these several conquests were the occasion that the Jews became more mingled with other nations than ever they were before. So that, as I told you, in our Saviour's time all the great cities in the world were full of them; and in every city, by the indulgence of the government, they had their synagogues. Now by this means the Gentiles having every where opportunity of conversing with the Jews, and having likewise their scriptures in the common language, many of them were in all places, by the blessing of God, converted from their pagan idolatry; and not only so, but by reading the scriptures, and hearing them read in the Jewish synagogues, were likewise brought to some expectation of the Messias, which was there promised. So that abundance of them were prepared, and were in readiness for the belief of the gospel, whenever it should be preached to them; and of such as these it is that my text speaks.

That I have not given you any wrong account of this matter appears plainly by this, that all along in the Acts of the Apostles you will find that that great harvest of the Gentiles, which the apostles reaped in every place, was chiefly made up of these worshipping Gentiles that I am now speaking of. These were the men that in every city were so forward to give up their names to Christ's religion: and the apostles were aware of this, and accordingly you find they always chose those places to preach the gospel in where there were Jewish synagogues, and

so not improbably a great number of these Gentile proselytes : such was Babylon, and Rome, and Corinth, and Antioch, and Ephesus, and Philippi, and Thessalonica, and a great many others. And that is the reason likewise that in St. Paul's Epistles to all these Gentile churches, which were of his planting, there is so much said concerning the Jews and the law of Moses, and the non-obligation of it, and such other things. All this had been impertinent to the Gentile Christians, had they not been tinctured with the Jewish notions about these matters.

In the fifth place, to draw this matter nearer to ourselves, you see, by what I have said, how much all this affair of being a Christian, or not being a Christian, depends upon the principles and dispositions that a man's mind is possessed with at that time when he comes to consider about the choice of his religion.

The inference that I draw from hence is this : of what infinite concernment it is to all those that have children or young persons about them, whose education they are to look after, to take care that their minds be seasoned betimes with good principles, and that there be put in them some sense of God and religion and another life in their tender years. If this care be taken, they will in all probability prove the good ground that is spoken of by our Saviour ; and when they come to years to choose for themselves, there is little doubt to be made but that they will voluntarily and heartily espouse the religion of Jesus Christ, and will find all the reason in the world to do so. But if no care be taken of them, but the weeds of vice (which are natural enough) be suffered first to possess the soil, that is, their passions, and lust, and

pride, and sensuality, and love of the world, have once taken up their hearts, it is very doubtful whether ever they will afterwards be fit for the kingdom of God; whether ever they will be prepared and disposed for eternal life, (as our text expresseth it.) It must be an extraordinary providence of God that must make them so.

In the sixth and last place, to conclude all. Our text tells us, that all that were disposed and prepared for eternal life believed. Here now is great comfort to be drawn from hence to all sincere, honest-minded men. What though there be great differences of religion at this time even amongst Christians, some being for one way, and some for another, and every one telling you that it is at the peril of your salvation if you do not join with them; (though, to speak truth, I know of no sect in the whole world, neither Jews nor Pagans nor Mahometans, much less Christians, that do so peremptorily pronounce damnation to all those that are not of their way, as the papists do, unless perhaps you will join with them a late sect among us called the Mugglestonians;) why, I say, let these differences be carried never so high, yet every sincere honest man is safe all the while. Every man that truly fears God, and endeavours heartily to approve himself to him by the practice of all those things that he is convinced to be God's will, I say, every such man may firmly depend upon the mercies of God for his salvation, for he is fitted and disposed for eternal life. And God will certainly either by his providence take care that means shall be afforded him for the coming to the right way, if he be not already in it; or, if he do not afford him those means, he will pardon his ignorance and mis-

takes, which he could not help, and accept of his honesty and sincerity in doing the best he could. For I account it an eternal truth which St. Peter hath told us in the tenth of the Acts, in his sermon to Cornelius, *God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.*

I pray God incline all our hearts thus to fear God, and work righteousness, that so we may find his favour in the great day of the Lord Jesus. This God of his mercy grant, for the sake of the same his dear Son our Lord: To whom, &c.

A SERMON

ON

MATTHEW XX. 16.

So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

THIS text seems to be made up of two short sentences; and I look upon them as proverbial expressions, because we find our Saviour doth more than once make use of them, though indeed always to the same purpose that he useth them here. As he applies them, they have a very easy and natural sense: but as we oftentimes make use of them, the meaning is very hard; at least abundance of people put such a meaning upon them as is uncomfortable enough, not to say worse.

It is my design at this time to clear the sense of this text, that nobody hereafter may be frightened with it; and the best key we can have to let us into the meaning of it is that parable which our Saviour just before had been delivering, upon occasion of which these words come in. Here are, as I said, two distinct sentences; the first of which seems to be a kind of inference from the parable which our Saviour had been delivering, *So the last shall be first, and the first last*; the other seems to be added as a reason for the truth of that, *for many be called, and few chosen*.

The parable, upon occasion of which these words were spoken, and which is to guide to the meaning

of them, is that famous one of the householder, that went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard; and some he hired in the beginning of the day, others three hours after, others at noon, others but just an hour before night. And in the evening, when they came to receive their wages, he ordered that that hire (which was a penny) which he had agreed with the labourers for that came the earliest, the same hire should be given to those that came in the latest, even those that had but wrought one hour. At which some of them murmured: but the householder's answer was, that he might dispose of his own as he pleased; and so long as he performed his contract with them, they had no reason to repine at his bounty to others.

This is the sum of the parable, and then come in the words of my text, by way of inference from the whole parable, *So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many are called, and few chosen.*

The business now that is here to be done, is to give such an account of this parable that there may appear a sufficient ground for this inference; that is to say, we are to connect, if we can, the premises with the conclusion; and if that be done, the sense of the text will be easy.

Now, certainly, by *the householder* in the parable is meant God Almighty; by *the vineyard* that he had is meant the church in all ages; by *the labourers* that he called to work in this vineyard are meant all those people to whom at any time he afforded the knowledge of his will, and the means of approving themselves to him. By *the penny* which these labourers were to have for their work is meant the reward that he made over to all those that

obeyed his call: and whereas all these labourers were hired but to work one day in the vineyard, that day, according to what I have now said, must be a very long day, as long as from the beginning of the world to the end thereof; for all that time God was to have a vineyard, and all that time men were to be called to work in it; and therefore by those labourers that were hired more early, must be meant those that were called to be of God's church in the earlier times of the world; and by those labourers that were hired more late, must be intended those that were called in the latter times of the world. And both these sorts of men were to receive their wages at the evening of the day, that is to say, at the end of the world. And when that time came, God would make no distinction between those that were called more early and those that were called more late, but would bestow as bountiful a reward upon those that came to work in the vineyard at the eleventh hour, as upon those that bore the burden and heat of the day.

This is the general interpretation of the parable; and for the truth of it we may appeal both to the parable itself, (which cannot, without violence, be made to speak any otherwise,) and likewise to the judgment of the best expositors of holy scripture, both ancient and modern.

But now, lest any one should say that this is not explicit enough, I will endeavour to give you a more particular account of this parable.

I do suppose that the great thing which our Saviour here designed to declare in this parable was this, that though the Jews were far sooner called to work in God's vineyard (that is, to be God's own

servants) than the Gentiles were, yet the Gentiles from henceforward should have the same privileges that they had ever had. The Gentiles from henceforward, though they were not called till the last ages of the world, should, upon their belief in Jesus Christ, be as much God's peculiar people as the Jews ever had been, and should have the same reward at the day of judgment, as if they had been God's people from the beginning: nay, not only so, but the Jews, for their unbelief, their not embracing the gospel that Christ preached to them, should be cast off from being God's peculiar people any longer: and the Gentiles, that were called at the eleventh hour, the last times of the world, should be put into their place, because they did believe in Christ Jesus, when the others did not. So that the proverbial saying should here be true, *The last shall be first, and the first last*; that is to say, the Gentiles that were last called in point of time should be first in the favour of God; and the Jews that were first called should be rejected by God for a season; not for ever rejected, but the Gentiles were to be preferred before them, and have their turn first; and afterwards, when the fulness of the Gentiles was come in, then should the Jews be again hired into the vineyard, (as both our Saviour intimates, and St. Paul expressly declares in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.) So that really in this case, as God ordered the matter, the last was first, and the first is last; and thus we see it verified to this very day. And this, I think, is a very clear account of the first sentence in my text. If any one now should ask a reason of this proceeding of God's, in casting off the body of the Jewish nation from being his people,

and taking in the Gentiles for his church, our Saviour in this place takes care likewise to give an account of that, and he doth it in these words, *for many be called, and few chosen*. The sense of which is plainly this; Christ came to preach his gospel to the Jews in the first place, and to them it was sufficiently preached, and the whole nation was called and invited to come into it. But though they were all thus called, yet few of them did accept of this call, few of them did embrace the gospel when it was thus preached. Few of them approved themselves the choice, elect, honest, sincere people of God, which they pretended to be; and therefore with great reason was the body of that nation to be abandoned, and the church of God to be gathered from among the Gentiles, who did more readily embrace the call of Christ Jesus. This, according to the best judgment I can make, is the true and the full sense of this text, and I am sure I have good authors to vouch for it.

If you require a scripture proof of this, I can give you that too. I have interpreted our Saviour's words here, *the last shall be first, and the first last*, of the rejection of the Jewish nation from being the church of God, and the taking in the Gentiles into their place: now for the truth of this I offer another text of our Saviour's, where he useth the very same expression; it is in Luke, chap. xiii. ver. 30: there our Saviour is speaking to the Jews, and he tells them how dismal a spectacle it would be to them to see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and they themselves cast out; and men *should come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the*

south, and should sit down in the kingdom of God; and then he adds, Behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. This, I think, is pretty fair to our purpose; but if it be not plain enough, mind how our Saviour himself explains it in another text, I mean Matt. viii. 11, 12. *Many, saith he, shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom* (that is, the whole generation of Israel, who received not the gospel at the preaching of Christ and his apostles) *shall be cast out into outer darkness.* Sure here is a sufficient explanation of his *last being first, and the first last.*

Again, I have interpreted the other sentence of our Saviour, of the *many being called, and few being chosen*, to signify the general invitation which Christ first made to the Jewish nation to believe in him, and the fewness of those that came in upon this invitation. Now, for the truth of this likewise, I have a text of the gospel to refer you to; there is but one other text where our Saviour useth these words, *many are called, but few chosen.* And it is likewise at the foot of a parable, as he useth them here; the place is Matt. xxii. 14. Now I appeal to all men that will consider that parable, whether this sentence must not necessarily have the same sense there which we do put upon it here. Our Saviour in that place describes the kingdom of heaven, or the state of the gospel in the world, by the similitude of a king, that sent forth his servants to invite all those of his royal city to the marriage feast of his son; but these citizens, when they were invited, re-

fused to come; made light of the invitation, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; nay, and the rest took the king's servants and treated them spitefully, and slew them. Here is a true description of the usage that our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles met with from the Jews, whom he invited to partake of his supper. Upon this the king saith to his servants, *The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. Go therefore into the highway, and as many as ye shall find, invite them to the marriage;* and the event was, that by this means the *wedding was furnished with guests.* Here now is a plain account of Christ's taking in the Gentiles to be the citizens of his kingdom instead of the Jews. Well; after this follows the aphorism that we are now upon, *for many are called, but few are chosen.* What can this refer to, but to the multitude of the Jews that were invited to Christ's religion, and the fewness of them that embraced it? this was the design of the parable; and, I dare say, this was the meaning of that sentence which concluded it.

But I will offer no more proof for the truth of this account which I have given of my text, because I would no longer spend my time in a thing that looks like a controversy. I think I have said enough to convince any unbiassed man, that this is the true sense of our Saviour's words, and therefore I will now build upon it.

And several inferences I have to draw from it.

First of all, from hence we see how impertinently this parable of the labourers that were hired into the vineyard is made use of to the purpose of a death-bed repentance. The common application of

it is this, that some men are called earlier, and some men later : but if a man be but called at any time, though it be in the last moments of his life, if even at that time he do but give any marks that God hath touched his heart, though he hath been otherwise never so lewd, so profligate a sinner all his life long, why here is ground enough for comfort ; for certainly this man is one of those that was called at the eleventh hour, the last time of his life, and he hath as much a title to the promises of God as if he had begun never so early.

I do not mean here to say any thing about this doctrine, either as to the truth or falseness of it ; but this I say, if it have no other ground to support it but this parable, it is built upon a very weak foundation ; for there is not one word of this parable that concerns particular persons, but only peoples and nations. *The day* that is here spoken of, in which men were called to do their work, is not meant of the term of a man's life, as if those that were called early were those that begun to be religious betimes ; those that were called at noon, were those that were converted at the middle part of their lives ; and those that were called at the eleventh hour, were those that never begun to consider of their ways till near the end of their days : this is indeed the common way of interpreting the parable, but it is quite at random from the scope of it ; for *the day*, as I told you, here spoken of, bears the same date with the world ; it begun with it, and is to end with it ; and, according to this notion of *the day*, it is impossible that all nations and generations should be called at one time, because they were not all at once in being, and

therefore some must be called sooner, and some later. The first that were called were the patriarchs: these were they that were sent to work in the vineyard early in the morning. Afterwards, in Abraham's time, God called others by a new covenant made with him and his seed, and these were those (we may suppose) that were called at the third hour of the day. Afterwards God makes a new call by Moses; and here he sets a hedge and a mound about his vineyard, distinguishing the Jews for his own people from all the rest of the world, and that, by obliging them to a world of rites and ceremonies that were never practised before: and these I take to be those that were called at the sixth hour, and of whom it is afterwards said in the parable, that *they had borne the burden in the heat of the day*: for truly, if God's people can bear a burden, the Jews did bear a great one in the very nature of their religion: but all this, as St. Paul tells us, was to *lead them to Christ*. And accordingly, at last, God Almighty did send Christ Jesus, and by him he broke down the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles, and made an universal call of all nations. But this was not till the last days, the *last times*, as the prophets expressly style them, that is, *the eleventh hour of the day*, as it is in the parable. Not that it is hereby meant that the world should end precisely within one twelfth part of that compass of time, after which Christ came, that it had continued from the beginning of it: but this is all that is meant, that the last dispensation that God would set on foot in the world for the happiness of man should be the sending of our Lord Jesus and his apostles. This should be his last call; and after this there

should be no more hiring of mankind (except in the ordinary way) to work in God's vineyard. This, as I told you before in general, (but have now explained it more particularly,) is the only true and natural sense of this parable. And if it be so, I appeal to all mankind, whether it hath any thing at all to do with any particular man's repenting either sooner or later; or whether any comfort can be drawn from hence to such men as have lived wickedly all their lives long, and never think of reforming till they come to die.

In the second place, another thing I observe from hence is this, that it is as impertinent to conclude from this parable, that all men that die in a good condition shall have equal rewards in the other world, because in the parable it is said, that those that wrought but one hour had the same wages adjudged to them with those that had wrought all the day; I say, this conclusion hath as little foundation from this parable, as the other opinion I now mentioned about a death-bed repentance. For, as you see, Christ doth not here speak of particular persons that were contemporaries, some of which might begin more early in their lives to serve God, and others begin later. If this had been the case of the parable, I should have owned it would have made no great difference in a man's future state, whether he lived well or ill the greatest part of his life, provided he became a good man and a sincere Christian at the last; for his rewards in the next world, according to this parable, would be much the same in both these cases: but, as I have over and over again said, the parable relates to a quite different matter, and speaks not of those that came into the

vineyard together, but of those that came in successively, perhaps many generations one after another. And of all these our Saviour pronounceth, that it shall be no lessening of their rewards that some nations were not called to be God's people as early as some others; for even those that were last called shall as abundantly partake of God Almighty's bounty in the other world, as if they had been his peculiar people from the beginning.

But now, I pray, what is all this to the greater or less degree of glory, or the greater or less degree of punishment, that particular men shall meet with in the future state, according to the different degrees of goodness or badness, virtue or vice, that they are found in when God calls them out of the world?

In the third place, another reflection, which I think I ought not to pass over without mentioning upon this occasion, is this, that, by what has been now said, you may see how very much people are out in their application of another parable, that I had occasion to quote since I begun this Discourse; I mean the parable wherein the king made a marriage for his son, and invited first his citizens, and afterwards all sorts of chance customers that were found straggling in the highways and lanes, to come and partake of the wedding supper.

This now, among us, is commonly expounded of the sacrament of the communion, which we call the Lord's supper. And, to be sure, if any man comes to partake of this sacrament, that is not satisfied in his own mind that he is fitly prepared and qualified to take it, he presently looks upon himself to be that guest which the parable mentions, which came

to the marriage supper without *having on a wedding garment*: and who, being discovered by the king to be in this unseemly habit, is ordered to be *bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness*.

But now all this is a great mistake; the parable saith not one word concerning the sacrament, but is quite about another business, as I have told you before: the marriage that is here made for the king's son, is certainly Christ Jesus his coming down into the world in our nature to espouse a church made up of all mankind. And accordingly all mankind are invited to come and partake of his mercies. The Jews were the first that were solemnly bidden, as there was reason for it, they having been a long time God's own citizens: but they rejected the invitation. Upon this the Gentiles were called in; and they do embrace the call. But it happened then, as it happens now, and will happen to the end of the world, that among those that, upon the invitation of Christ and his apostles, came in to Christianity, and entered themselves into the new covenant, some were not sincere, but proved hypocrites; they professed Christ's religion, but yet, for all that, their natures were not changed, they still stuck to their old Gentile customs, which corrupt nature had taught them; though they called themselves the children of the light, yet they lived no better than if they had still remained in the darkness of heathenism. Thus, I say, it was then; and thus it is now, and will always be so. But now all these hypocritical professors shall, at the last day, be detected and openly punished. When God, at the end of the world, comes to take a view of his

guests, he will make a difference with a witness between all real and all pretended Christians. Those that have nothing but the name and the profession, all those shall be looked upon as *not having on a wedding garment*, but to be in the state of heathenism. But all those that, together with their baptism and profession of Christ's religion, do bring forth fruit suitable to it; all these, I say, shall enter with the Bridegroom into his everlasting mansions of glory, when the others shall be shut out. This, I dare confidently say, is the true account of that parable; and now judge ye, whether there be any thing in it that hath to do with the sacrament.

But, fourthly, from this account that I have given of my text, you may see what little reason any one hath from this text to put the issue of his future hopes upon any decrees of God concerning his particular election, or what little reason any one hath to be disturbed or disquieted from this text, upon account that he doth not know whether he be particularly elected to salvation or no. And yet this is the common use that this text is put to. There is a sort of divinity in the world that stands so much upon a particular election, that, if you cannot assure yourselves that you are in the number of those that are by name written in the book of life, will hardly allow you to be true children of God, whatever other evidence you may produce for it. And this text I am now upon is one of the great pillars of this sort of divinity, *many are called, but few are chosen*; that is to say, many are called to be Christians, but yet none shall be effectually saved, but those that are from all eternity chosen and elected of God to sal-

vation. And therefore, above all things, study to make that out to yourselves.

I will not now dispute the truth of this doctrine. It is all one to me, whether God from all eternity did predestinate all particular persons, that shall be saved, to salvation; or whether he only made a general decree, that whosoever did embrace the gospel, and live according to it, should be saved, knowing in the mean time who would embrace the gospel, and who would not: I say, this is not a matter that, I think, ought to be controverted; and if we be so foolish as to dispute about it, I do not see that we are the wiser by it, but are as much at a loss when we have done, as we were at the beginning. But this I dare confidently say, that God Almighty never meant that we should put the evidence of our salvation, or our hopes of being happy hereafter, upon such a point as this; but hath all along taught us other methods for the trying whether we belong to God or no, quite different from this of our particular election. And as for this text, that is so much urged for the necessity of a particular election, I think I have already made it plain to you, that it refers quite to another business. For all the meaning of these words, as I have shewed, is no more than this, that many in those times were called and invited by Christ to believe in him, but few did answer the call, or accept of the invitation. But what is this to any eternal decree that God has passed concerning the salvation or damnation of particular men?

Well; but it will be said, that the words, if they be strictly rendered from the original, will import more; for thus they run, if you translate them lite-

rally, *Many are the called, but few are the elect*. Now what can you understand by *the elect*, but those that are from all eternity particularly decreed by God to everlasting salvation? I answer, I readily own that this is a good translation of the passage; but I utterly deny that this is the notion of *the elect* in this place: nay, I think I may say in any other place, either in the Old or New Testament. Two notions I know of *the elect* in scripture; but I know of no more. Sometimes by *the elect* are meant all those persons in a nation which are in covenant with God, and do own his religion; and in this sense the whole people of the Jews are several times in the Old Testament called *God's elect*; and in the New Testament, all that embraced Christ's religion are likewise called by the same name. Both all the Jews and all the Christians are in scripture styled *God's elect*, that is, in their several turns they were chosen by God for his peculiar people, though yet among those there were abundance of wicked men and reprobates. Now it is this notion of election that we believe our Saviour meant, when he said, *Many are the called, but few are the elect*. I think he designeth no more by those words than this; that few of those that had the gospel preached to them did really believe in him, and enter themselves into covenant with him.

And that this is a true notion of election, such as the scripture gives of it, to omit abundance of other plain proofs, doth sufficiently appear by that remarkable passage of St. Peter, Second Epistle, chap. i. 10. where he begs of all Christians to *give all diligence, not only to make their calling, but their election sure*. Why, if the apostle had had any notion of an elec-

tion of particular persons from all eternity to salvation, it is impossible he should ever have spoke these words; for he knew as well as we, that an eternal decree of God concerning a particular man's salvation would certainly have its effect: and it had been nonsense to bid us apply all our diligence in the making of that sure and certain which was already sure and certain in itself. It is plain, therefore, that he speaks of the election of Christians as a thing that might fail them, if they did not give all diligence to make it effectual; and therefore undoubtedly he meant no more by their election than the privileges they were called to of professing Christianity, or their being chosen into the number of God's people. This, I say, is one of the notions of election that we frequently meet with in holy scripture; and I do verily believe that in this notion the chosen, or the elect, in my text, are to be understood.

And thus much of my fourth inference. I now proceed to a fifth. Though I contend that this sense of my text I have given is the true literal account of it, and that which was principally designed when the words were spoken, yet I do not deny but that there is another very good sense to be given of it, and such as both the words will bear, and is likewise more accommodable to us at this day than the other sense is: but then it hath nothing to do with that notion of particular election that we are now speaking of. I have told you that I knew but two notions of election in the holy scriptures. One of them I have already given you: the other I am now to speak of. When the elect are spoken of in scripture, there is sometimes more included in that word

than a bare profession of God's religion, whether under the law or under the gospel; it imports, that a man, together with his right belief, doth frame his life according to it. In several passages of scripture those are called God's elect that do really approve themselves to him by framing their lives suitably to those heavenly doctrines they have received from him; and therefore we find that the elect of God are frequently joined with the holy, with the pure, with the beloved of God, as all signifying the same thing. Now, in this sense of the word, to be in the number of the elect, it is not enough to be a Christian in profession, but to live as a Christian ought to live. Taking now the elect in my text in this sense, this is the meaning of the words; *Many*, saith our Saviour, *are the called, but few are the elect*; that is to say, Many are those that will, in all the ages of the world, profess the Christian religion, but yet few are those that are choice, sincere disciples of Jesus Christ; few are those that will live up to their Christian profession; few are those that are *elect and precious*, as St. Peter joins both those words together; in a word, few are those whose conversation is suitable to their calling. This now, I say, is an honest and safe interpretation of my text, and such a one as better fits our present times than that other, which I told you was that which was principally intended. But there is nothing in it that looks towards a particular election, nor indeed do we know any thing of that matter.

But, sixthly and lastly, to conclude all:

The last thing I take notice of in this text is, the wonderful counsel of God in rejecting the Jews, when the gospel was first preached, and taking in

the Gentiles to be in their place; and then again, after many ages, designing to receive the Jews again for his people. This I judge to be plainly said in the words of my text, *The last shall be first, and the first last*; that is, as I have told you, the Gentiles, who were last called, shall at this time have the precedence of the Jews, who were first called: but then they themselves should be called, effectually called, to the belief of Christianity after *the fulness of the Gentiles was come in*. For though the first are to be last, yet called they must be, though they be last called, if our account of the words be true. It is true, this is not yet come to pass in the world, for the Jews are all yet obstinate unbelievers, though yet they are a vast body of men spread over all the world. But I do verily believe, God Almighty would never have kept a people so long from mixing with the nations, though they are dispersed into all the parts of the earth, had he not designed to rally them all one day, and to reunite them with the body of the church. And I do not speak this without grounds; for, to omit other texts of scripture, I cannot imagine what sense can be given to those words of St. Paul, in the eleventh of the Epistle to the Romans, ver. 25, if what I have said be not the sense of it; *I would not, saith he, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, that blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sake: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.*

For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. St. Paul prosecutes this argument with a great many other words. I grant his whole discourse is obscure, as all prophecies must be, till they be fulfilled. But there are proofs enough in it to make any man conclude that the Jews shall at last be converted to the faith of Christ: nay, and more than that, that as their general rejection of our Saviour was the cause of the Gentiles being called into Christianity; so the infidelity and coldness that is to be found among us, as to the Christian religion, will be an occasion of bringing them over to the belief in Christ. And by this means will God raise the reputation of the Christian religion, that is so horribly sunk away among us that do profess it.

But I dare say no more in so obscure an argument.

I pray God hasten the coming of his kingdom, that all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, may, with one heart and with one mouth, join together in the giving glory to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

To whom, &c.

END OF VOL. IV.





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